



IN THE DAYS
OF KING HAL
MARION AMES TAGGART



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IN THE DAYS OF KING HAL.



"Holding the proclamation high in his right hand, the herald raised his left hand." P. 16.

IN THE DAYS OF KING HAL.

BY

MARION AMES TAGGART,

AUTHOR OF "LOYAL BLUE AND ROYAL SCARLET," "THREE GIRLS AND ESPECIALLY ONE,"

"BY BRANSCOME RIVER," ETC., ETC.

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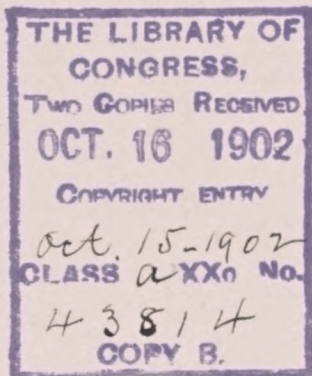
NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO :

BENZIGER BROTHERS,

Printers to the Holy Apostolic See.

1902.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
THE COMING OF THE KING'S HERALD,	9
CHAPTER II.	
THE GOING OF THE KING'S HERALD,	19
CHAPTER III.	
THE ARM OF THE KING,	30
CHAPTER IV.	
FROM CASTLE TO TOWER,	41
CHAPTER V.	
A BRIEF TENURE,	54
CHAPTER VI.	
A KNIGHTLY ENTERPRISE,	67
CHAPTER VII.	
IN THE TOWER,	80
CHAPTER VIII.	
TIDINGS FROM ACROSS THE CHANNEL,	96

	PAGE
CHAPTER IX.	
GALLANT HARRY, THE KING,	107
CHAPTER X.	
"THIS DAY IS CALLED THE FEAST OF CRISPIN,"	120
CHAPTER XI.	
THE ADVENTURES OF LADY ISABEL,	133
CHAPTER XII.	
A DARRINGTON TO THE RESCUE,	147
CHAPTER XIII.	
DARRINGTON OF DARRINGTON ONCE MORE,	160

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
FRONTISPIECE.	
Headband,	9
“ ‘Pardon, sir,’ said the constable, doffing his cap and kneeling, in which he was followed by the more important townsmen.”	13
‘He was quickly admitted, in response to his summons, to find a few of Lord Darrington’s immediate, personal servitors seated around the long black oaken table chatting so cheerfully that it was evident no syllable of the bad news he brought had reached them.’	21
“Dick fired, straight and true, at the herald going singing down the hill.”	25
“Lord Darrington looked at the parchment held toward him, but did not touch it; his brows knit, and his lips compressed themselves in a hard line.”	31
“Looking from the battlement saw an armored figure on horseback gazing up at him.”	37
“Lord Darrington, supporting Isabel on his arm, led the way.”	43
“But at that instant the tall figure of Father Jerome, in his Benedictine habit, came swiftly down the meadow, and Isabel, snatching Stephen’s hand, ran to meet him.” .	49
“With the heartiest good will in the world, two of the three attendants dismounted and sprang forward, one of them dealing a tremendous blow with his ax on the iron-bound oak.”	57
“When the last words were read, the air was rent with cheers.”	61
“The excitement of the past hour shone in his eyes; before he had spoken, Lady Margaret caught the alarm and flew to her elder son, certain that the younger had evil tidings to communicate.”	69

	PAGE
“ ‘Farewell, my dear, my dearest son,’ she murmured.” . . .	75 ✓
“He found King Hal seated at the end of a small table idly pulling the ears of a greyhound, whose long head lay stretched out on his royal master’s lap.”	83 -
“Isabel threw herself on his shoulder, her arms encircling his neck.”	91 ✓
“The countryman rested on the handle of his rude plow, one hand thrust into his leathern breeches pocket, and eyed Roger suspiciously some minutes before answering his question.”	97 -
“Stopping short, and looking around, he saw a pale, dark face smiling at him.”	103 ✓
“Alain rode up to the walls and, shading his eyes with his hand, scanned the action raging before Harfleur. The assault was even then drawing to its close.”	109 -
“He saw a young, strong form clad in complete armor, sitting at a table.”	115 ✓
“Stepping in front of his clergy, the abbot-bishop lifted up his thin, sweet voice: ‘Deus, in adjutorium meum intende,’ he chanted. And like a solid rock of sound came back the response.”	123 -
“ ‘God for King Hal !’ hoarsely shouted the dry English throats.”	129 ✓
“Isabel fitted it to her delicate, lithe frame.”	139 ✓
“Isabel, seated by the bed, heard Hugo’s step on the stone outside the door, and started to her feet.”	143 -
“Instantly the battlements were swarming with activity.” .	149 -
“ ‘My armor,’ cried Alain, and Jean buckled it around him.” .	155 ✓
“Raoul pointed to the prostrate figure with a passionate motion.”	163
“Dame Winifred, drying her eyes, led the way to the door, and Jean followed proudly. To the surprise of all, she went out of the house, and turned up the hill.”	167 -



IN THE DAYS OF KING HAL.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMING OF THE KING'S HERALD.

THE little town of Darrington Towers lay in peaceful repose at the foot of its feudal castle, lapped in the spring sunshine. It was not the habit of the villagers to question fate. Since the time of Rufus, the ruddy son of the Conqueror, Darrington Castle had crowned those heights, ruled over by a Lord Darrington, and his dependents felt no doubt that their existence was owing to this long-abiding established order of things; that they tilled their fields—and paid their tithes—during the somewhat rare periods of peace, owing not less, and more perceptibly, to the pro-

tection of the lords of Darrington than to that of Heaven. And if their feudal lord led them to battle and to death, as was frequently the case, why then it was incontrovertibly true that a man must needs die once, and it was a beautiful and consoling thought that his widow and children would receive dole until their time came in turn at the big gate of the castle.

The lords of Darrington had always been restless, fighters by nature and choice. They had won their cognomen by their deeds of derring-do, according to which derivation, indeed, it was then spelled by the few who dealt in such subtleties as spelling in the days of King Hal. In the time of the old king, and while the merry prince was entertaining himself with light-hearted highway robbery, the lord of Darrington had been openly against the house of Lancaster, throwing himself heartily into the camp of Harry Hotspur of Northumberland. But now that King Henry the Fourth was dead, Harry the Fifth reigned with a strong hand that showed no sign of earlier relaxation. The disaffected Earl Darrington was dead also, and his son, too, ruled in his place. Hotspur was put down forever; the Lollards were in process of crushing, and Lord Darrington rested in his castle, apparently satisfied to accept the defeat of his father's party and live at peace under the Red Rose. He was of less warlike complexion than his race, a man with somewhat the taste and habits of a scholar, devoted to his family, and meddling little with the world of strife, of which, mayhap, as he had come to his title late in life, he had seen too much.

Hence it was that the village of Darrington Towers was enjoying the beauties of a May morning, balmy even in the north, and thanking its stars that it had no dictated objections to the reign-

ing king, in regard to whom its notions were of the vaguest. The village was backed on the north by the castle-crowned hill; on the east and west fields of bright, soft English green skirted the eminence, stretching away toward the adjoining counties; a road from the village gates led southward, losing itself in the shades of the forest, at the other end of which, the villagers believed, lay London.

It was down this road, beneath the scantier lines of trees near the forest's boundary, that a woman, resting from planting peas, and looking afar southward, saw a glittering movement which past experience enabled her to construe aright.

"There be soldiers and their knaves coming," she cried toward the pig pen, and her good man, coming on the word around the corner, confirmed her judgment with the force of his slower but unimpeachable masculine intellect.

Instantly the repose of the village was broken. The constable ordered the gates shut, and a messenger despatched to the castle. If, he argued most sagely, Lord Darrington was at peace with the world and his king, then armed men riding on the village could come but in enmity, and it behooved good men and true to receive them accordingly.

The glittering little cavalcade rode out of the shade of the forest into the full glare of the May sunshine. On to the closed gates they rode, and, knocking there, demanded entrance in the king's name.

"Who dares thus abuse His Majesty's authority, and thunder at the gates of his loyal subjects?" demanded the constable, who prided himself on talking like a clerk.

"The king's messenger. Open to the king's herald! It will

be the worse for you if you dare keep us waiting, cooling our heels in the anteroom of your petty sovereignty," came back the answer.

"Why should you be the king's herald? We have no business with the king, save to pay taxes and fight for him if needs must," argued the constable, at the head of his admiring burghers.

"Why I am the king's herald is the business of His Majesty who appoints me, and none of yours, fellow. Business with the king such as you will never have, but His Majesty hath business with you, and with that lord of yours. Open, and that instantly! If we are kept longer parleying it will go sore with you. Open!" cried the herald, angrily.

"Perhaps 'twere as well to see the fellow, and whether he hath really the king's seal and warrant," said the constable, cautiously.

A murmur of assent greeted these words, while from without a thundering blow fell on the locked gates, and the herald shouted: "A curse on you! Open, or they will be blown to splinters!"

"Yes, good sir; we are but fitting the key," responded the constable, and in a moment the gates swung to admit ten horsemen, the herald, with frowning brows and angry looks, riding at their head.

Without a word, but with the royal banner so displayed that none could doubt their authority, the armed band rode into the center of the village, followed by its citizens and the trembling constable, quite cowed by a glimpse of the king's insignia, and the thought that he, Nicholas Witman, had dared resist it a moment.

Arrived at the square, which was the market-place, the herald and his followers dismounted, and, turning to the constable, showed him a paper sealed with the royal seal.

“Dost know that, sirrah, or must that, too, like our right of admittance, be pounded into your thick noddle?” he demanded.

“Pardon, sir,” said the constable, doffing his cap and kneeling, in which he was followed by the more important townsmen. “I did but my duty in making sure that I was not opening hastily to any one who might falsely claim the king’s authority. Well



“‘Pardon, sir,’ said the constable, doffing his cap and kneeling, in which he was followed by the more important townsmen. ‘I did but my duty in making sure that I was not opening hastily to any one who might falsely claim the king’s authority.’”

do I know, and most heartily venerate, that royal seal. His Majesty King Henry, the fifth of that glorious name, hath no more loyal subjects than here in us, the citizens of Darrington Towers, and in our lord above in the castle, who will more worthily than we receive the king’s herald when time allows him to learn of your coming.”

“As to that, good constable,” said the herald, magnificently, “I am satisfied of your loyalty, and that you had no intention of resisting the king’s authority, once satisfied that it was at your gates. But of your lord I am less assured. It is to announce to you that we of the court, like our royal master, doubt his loyalty I am come.”

“Doubt his loyalty! What, my lord Darrington’s?” cried the constable, rising, and surprised into forgetfulness of his own importance. “Surely you are jesting, or else have been grievously misinformed. My lord’s father was disaffected, it is true, but those were in the troublous days of the old king, before King Harry had taken the reins into his firm hands. Since his accession, and the death of our old lord, Darrington Castle hath been an abode of fealty; our present lord hath no taste for intrigue, but cares only for quiet, and serves his king truly by letting well enough completely alone.”

“So you think, I hope and believe, sir constable, but such is not the case,” returned the herald. “Certain information hath reached the king that your lord is plotting for the restoration of the Yorkists. Proof has been laid before His Majesty, and a writ of attainder has been at last made out. He is accused of treason, and it is to publish the proclamation that his lands and person, and that of his children, are confiscated I am come to-day.”

“Treason! My lord a traitor to the king! Why, ’tis madness!” gasped the constable, while a murmur of horror and indignation arose on all sides, for Lord Darrington was well loved and his distaste for politics an established fact.

“Have a care of your tongue, fellow,” warned the herald.

“It does not become you to call the king’s acts madness. I see that you are ignorant of the truth; it shall be set down to your credit in my report at court. But that your lord is a traitor is a fact, for he is thus set forth in this proclamation, and in it you are all absolved, nay forbidden, under penalty of sharing his guilt, of further allegiance to him. Whoso obeys, shelters, in any way abets him, becomes, like him, false to the throne.”

“Forbidden to obey Lord Darrington!” cried the constable. “Then who is lord over us, and under whose banner are we enrolled?”

“Admirably put, sir constable! Your point is well taken. You would do credit to London, I doubt not, if fortune sent you to court,” said the herald, condescendingly. “It may be that you know of another branch of Darringtons, cousins of the about-to-be-deposed lord. They have ever been loyal to the house of Lancaster. The estates and title will be conferred upon them, and you will still have over you a Lord Darrington of the old stock.”

“It is a plot to wrong my lord!” cried a fresh young voice in the crowd. “He is no more traitor than you or I. I have heard it said that those cousins hungered for Darrington, and I’ll wager they have beset the king’s ears—”

The voice died out in muffled struggles to be heard, and the owner of the hand that had been forcibly pressed over the speaker’s mouth said fiercely, in his ear: “Be quiet, Dick! Think you such as we can alter the king’s decree, or serve our lord by angering his enemies?”

“There is no plot, save Lord Darrington’s plot to unseat his lawful sovereign, young cock,” said the herald, striving to distin-

guish the speaker. "You will now all listen, with the reverence due them, to the words of the king's proclamation, by which you will be instructed as to your former lord's guilt and your duty both as regards him and the new lord whom the king will set over you. Fall back there, you men; you press somewhat boldly upon the king's majesty, as represented by me. Here, bare your heads, while I mount that platform yonder. So! That is well. Silence! See that no one speaks or moves; if any dare do either prick him into respect with your swords," he added, to his own men. Standing on the raised platform from which Lord Darrington was accustomed to address his followers on occasions of harvest festivals or holidays, the herald unrolled with great solemnity, and no little self-importance, the proclamation which he carried, tied with a scarlet ribbon, sealed with the royal seal, and written fair on heavy parchment in a monkish hand, as were all documents of the period.

Silence fell over the assembly of simple souls, to whom a king's warrant was only less than the king's person, and the nearest they could ever hope to come to the latter. With the customary introductory flourish of "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" the herald read the proclamation, standing with his feet on a level with the people's heads, who listened awe-struck and sorrowful, the women leaning from the adjoining windows even shedding tears as the herald pronounced the lord of Darrington deposed from his rank, his estates confiscated, his honor lost, his person forfeit to the pleasure of the king, to be yielded up for conveyal to London, where he should await trial in the Tower on the charge of treason against the king's most high majesty.

Holding the proclamation toward the crowd high in his right

hand as he ended, the herald raised his left hand, and pointed backward toward the castle.

“You have heard, men of Darrington,” he cried, “the will of the king. If one among you dare disobey this edict, and serve in any capacity the former earl of Darrington, now disgraced and deposed, let him look to it. He is no king’s man who disobeys the king, and Henry the Fifth is not an ox to be bearded with impunity. He is the lion of England, and though he is so great that France trembles at the prospect of his coming to seize the crown he claims, he still can find room to crush, and will crush, the least of his subjects who flouts him. Darrington will be razed, and every man’s home burned above him if there be one among you who does not bend to this decree, putting down forever your false lord, and who does not pay ready and true allegiance to the new lord of Darrington whom the king will set up. You have heard. God save the king!”

In silence, broken only by low mutterings, the crowd turned from the square, and dispersed in knots of two and three. Lord Darrington was indeed well beloved; not a face there but expressed the sorrow each man felt at the misfortune which had overtaken him. But it was an assembly which had never thought nor acted for itself; resistance to the king’s will was not to be considered, even had it occurred to them, and prudence forbade the utterance of the regret filling all hearts.

Only one dared speak his mind.

“It is a plot, I tell you,” said the youth who had spoken before the reading of the proclamation. “Those sneaking cousins of my lord long for the Darrington acres and the earldom. I’ll see him righted if I have to go to the king to do it!”

“Peace, fool! What do you gain by running your head in a noose held by the strongest fingers in the world? Take heed to yourself and ourselves, and bring not on all of us the ruin threatened if we try to befriend my lord,” whispered one.

“God forbend such prudence!” said Dick, with a sob. “You are a parcel of curs that eat my lord’s bread, and turn tail in the hour of misfortune. I’m away to the castle; he shall know, and so shall my sweet young Lady Isabel, that there’s one true heart among his people which is not turned liver at the blast of a herald’s trumpet, though it be but a boy’s heart, and useless to do aught but beat thankful.”

So saying Dick slipped from the hands that would have held him, and ran swiftly up the hill toward Darrington Castle.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOING OF THE KING'S HERALD.

DICK ran at his best speed up the hill toward the castle. On the side which was toward the village Darrington Castle was not moated, though on its northern end and rear a deep moat half-encircled it, the water for which, in case of necessity, was forced up from the river which flowed past at the distance of a mile from its gates.

Dick made a short cut up the steep road from the town, leaping brambles and diving beneath branches, till, all breathless, he arrived at a well-known entrance which communicated with the lower hall. Here he was quickly admitted, in response to his summons, to find a few of Lord Darrington's immediate, personal servants seated around the long black oaken table chatting so cheerfully that it was evident no syllable of the bad news he brought had reached them, although the messenger sent up by the constable on the arrival of the herald must long since have come to the upper hall. Dame Winifred, the tiring-woman and foster-mother of my lord's only daughter, young Lady Isabel, sat in the place of honor in the middle of the table; at her right was little Lord Stephen, Lord Darrington's only son, whose birth had cost his mother's life, but who, since that event, ten years before, had not wanted a mother's tenderness, supplied as it was by good Dame Winifred.

Beside the young heir sat the gray-haired minstrel, the poet of three generations of Darringtons and their brave deeds. At the foot of the table was Hugo Longbow, a soldier so courageous, a retainer so true, that Dick's eyes lighted as they rested on him, feeling sure here was one who would aid his mad plan of resistance to the king. Beside Dame Winifred again, but on her left, sat Jude, the fool, who, like most of his class, was less fool than wise man, and who was wholly devoted to his lord. Opposite Dame Winifred sat the maid Audrey, whose duty was to serve her young mistress, and on whose blooming face Dick never failed to look with favor.

Dick seated himself at the end of the board opposite Hugo and rested his elbows well forward on the dark oak, not smiling in response to the hearty greeting given him by all.

"I see you have not heard the news," he said, without parley.

"What news?" demanded Hugo, scowling, catching at once the tragic note in the lad's voice. "A messenger came up from the constable more than an hour ago, but he went directly to my lord, nor have we heard aught."

"There's a king's herald down yonder," said Dick, going straight to the point. "He has read in the square a proclamation in which my lord is attainted of treason for plotting against His Majesty King Henry the Fifth. We are forbid obedience to him, and commanded allegiance to his cousin, the Warwickshire Darringtons, who are to be set over us in my lord's place."

Hugo started up with the deep curse of an old trooper; Dame Winifred clutched her nursling to her breast, seeing in a glance him dishonored and defrauded. Jude and Matthew rose with blanched faces turned piteously toward Dick, begging him mutely

for denial of his own tidings, but the lad, with tears running down his cheeks, nodded to confirm it.

"It's infamous!" Hugo blurted out, his face purpling with rage and grief. "My lord, who cares no more for parties and politics than Lady Isabel's white kitten! 'Tis a plot for the title of those—" And Hugo characterized the Warwickshire cousins in terms less suited to the presence of the women than agreeable to



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them whose wrath was not less deep than his, and whose sex prevented them expressing it forcibly.

"I knew it, Hugo, my brave old Hugo!" cried Dick, ecstatically. "I knew you'd see it as I do. Those village hinds are frightened into submission by the threat that if one of their number shows sympathy to my lord the whole village shall be razed in pun-

ishment for the crime—crime of fidelity, mark you! Darrington Castle can hold out against assault; do you fight the force, when such shall come, which would seize my lord and install his kinsfolk and foes. In the mean time I will hence to the bishop, who loves my lord, and get an embassy to the king, headed, if I know him, by my lord bishop himself, to tell His Majesty the truth, which he has never heard. And then with a royal order we will return, drive off the invaders, and hold Darrington for the true Darringtons to the end of time.”

“Hurrah!” shouted the little lord, starting to his feet. “Hurrah for brave Dick! When ’tis done, Diccon, my father will know how to reward you. He’ll get you knighted, and you shall have a device telling how true you were—mayhap you can quarter the Darrington arms on your shield.”

“Time enough to settle Dick’s arms, dear chick,” sobbed Dame Winifred. “Your plan is a dream of youth, Dick, good lad—of youth which ever feels that it is but necessary to point out an injustice to have it righted. When you have lived as long as I you will know men are not so easily molded to the right. We must be guided by our dear lord. What is his will we should do, that must be done.”

“Dame Winifred speaks like a counselor,” said the minstrel. “Let us go to our lord and lay at his feet all our fidelity, to do with as beseems him. Since we have lived for him and his—some of us long, too long to bear this cruel day!—it would be little to die for him should he decide to hold out against this injustice. It would be harder to live for him, hard for hot blood to be patient, but if that is his desire Hugo and Dick must curb their necks to his rein.”

Hugo struck the table with his broad hand. "It's like tearing my heart out to say it," he muttered, "but Dame Winifred's right. Fighting's my trade, but I believe this is a case for craft—curse it! We can't do as you wish, Diccon, lad, much as I like your plan; it's not practical. Come to my lord. We'll show him that we, at least, are ready to live or die for him, as Matthew says."

Dick flung himself on his feet, too angry and disappointed for a word, and followed the others to the upper hall. A large fireplace glowed red with the forest trees burning in it, dogs lay before it in various attitudes of comfort, while between the paws of the largest of them curled Lady Isabel's white kitten, secure and peaceful.

At the further end of the hall a tall man, dark of tint, with darker eyes and hair, a purple gown wrapped about him, sat leaning his head upon his hand, gazing at nothing with wide, heavy eyes. At his feet, her bright head resting on his knee, her hands clasping one of his, lay a slender girl of perhaps seventeen, who, raising her head at the sound of footsteps, showed a beautiful face swollen with heavy weeping.

Dame Winifred ran to her and took her in her arms, her ejaculation of "My lamb!" lost in a great sob. The girl clung to her, and the sound of their sobbing alone broke the perfect stillness of the room for a few moments.

Then Lord Darrington raised his head, and spoke slowly, steadily, but very low.

"My friends," he said, "you know the misfortune that has come upon us; you know how ill I have deserved it. There will be a new lord over Darrington shortly; I think and hope you will be

happier than I in being able to remain in your ancient home, and will receive at my cousin's hands the kindness I can no longer show you."

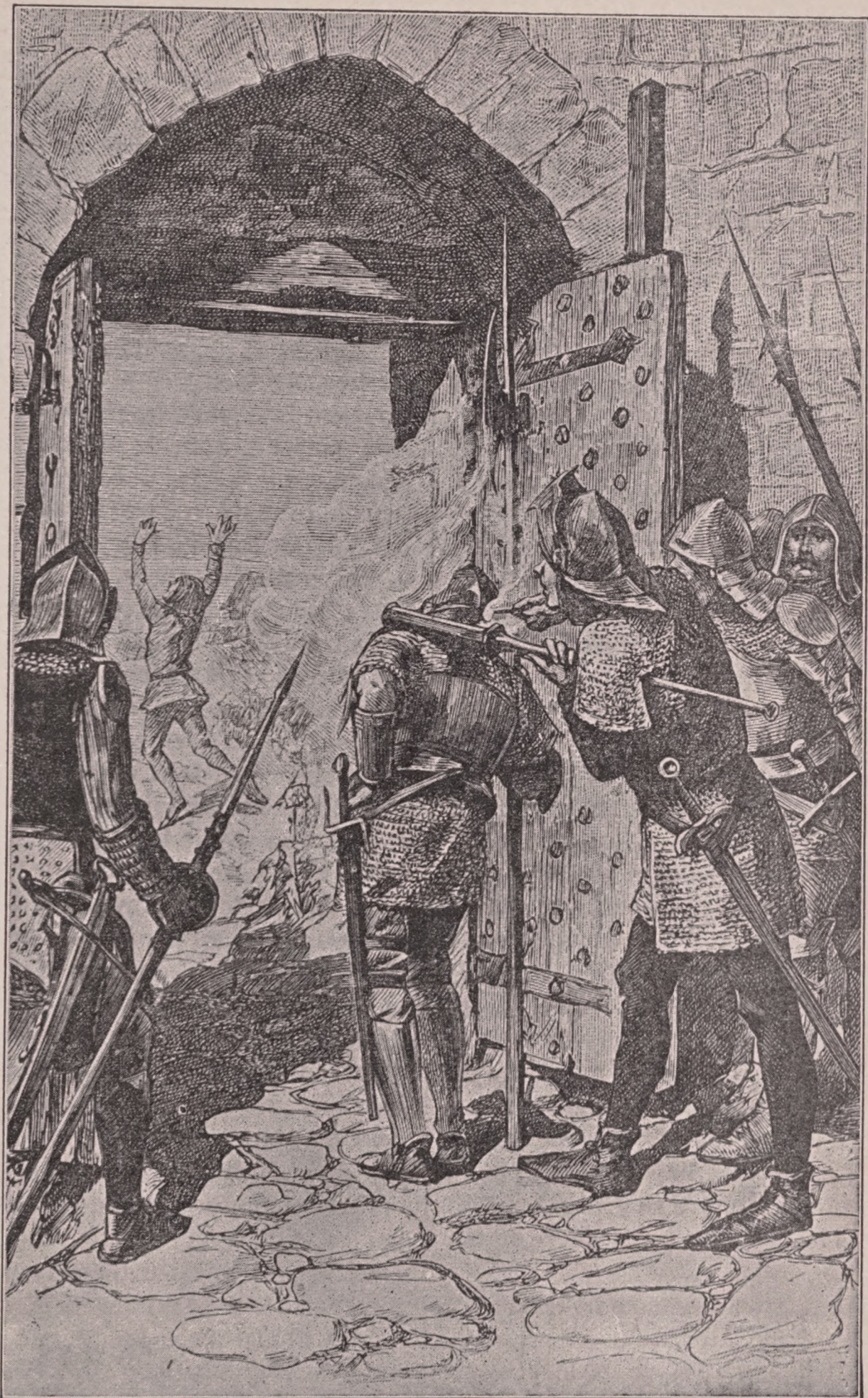
"Curse your cousin, my lord!" cried Hugo. "Do you think there is one of us would eat his bread or serve him? Where you go, we go."

"Not to the Tower, Hugo," said Lord Darrington, holding out his hand. "There would be scant lodging there for all of you, and it would not serve me. My hope is that later I shall be able to establish my innocence, and that our gallant king shall reinstate me. For King Henry is a brave, great-hearted youth, who would not wrong me an' he realized that I was his sincerely loyal subject."

"Don't submit, my lord!" cried Dick, pushing forward to throw himself at Lord Darrington's feet. "I came hither to beg you to hold the castle against all robbers, and while you hold it let me go to my lord bishop, get him to journey in haste to London, set your case in its true light before His Majesty, and—for the castle will hold out so long—when he has won his case a king's mandate shall drive away the assault from your gates, and you will have held your right against treachery and injustice."

Lord Darrington smiled.

"You are a good lad, Dick, and if ever matters go well with me again you shall get your due. But no resistance, boy. Your plan shall be in part carried out. All the influence I have shall be brought to bear for me, but I will not resist the king's command; in the Tower, not in Darrington Castle, I will wait for right to be done me, for that is the only course open to true wisdom. Am I not right, dear Matthew, who served my father and who loved me



"Dick fired, straight and true, at the herald going singing down the hill,"



from my birth? And you, too, Jude, fool who are wiser than the wise who are fools, and true beyond all wisdom?"

"Yes, my lord; I would counsel you as you have decided," said Matthew. "Opposition would set your cause awry before it was heard at court."

"If you were a fool, good master, you could not have decided better, nor more in accordance with the advice of your fool, whose wits you condescend to trust," added Jude.

"Then so be it, dear friends; and but one thing more," said Lord Darrington. "For a short time we shall remain in possession; when the summons come, we go to London and to the Tower. Until then let us enjoy the good left us, and trust in God. But promise me one thing. We all hope for a happy outcome to this evil done me by those who should be kind, as they are kin. But if the end be worse than we believe, will you promise me to be as faithful to these children, to your Lady Isabel, to your rightful lord, my little son Stephen, as you would be to me?"

"As we hope for salvation, my lord, our allegiance to you, alive or dead, and to them who are your flesh, shall never alter," said Hugo, solemnly. And raising their hands to the heavy oaken rafters, black with the smoke of four hundred years of fires burned on the hearth of a lord of Darrington, each one present took a solemn oath to be faithful to the young heirs on whom misfortune had laid heavily her hand thus early.

With a hearty but silent hand-clasp Lord Darrington, and in turn Isabel and Stephen, parted for the time from the little band who felt their grief as their own, and the faithful souls turned with dim eyes to the hall they had quitted.

"Where is that cursed herald who has croaked like a raven the

fall of a noble house?" asked Dick, breaking the silence in which all had resumed their places around the hall.

"My lord has doubtless sent him down for refreshment in his best sack, that he may go away strengthened to do more evil, and report the quality of the contents of the Darrington cellars to those who covet them," said Hugo, bitterly.

"I'll go below and watch him reel away; belike custom hath not enabled him to carry such hearty drafts," said Dick.

It occurred to no one to object to this proposition, nor had the hot-headed youth who made it any ulterior motive beyond, possibly, a boyish desire to hurl insults after the retreating harbinger of misfortune. He arrived at the main gate looking down the hill to the village, just in time to see the herald, somewhat unsteady on his legs as he had prophesied, starting down the slope. His companions had preceded him riding; owing, likely, to the quality of the Darrington sack, the herald had lingered.

"There he goes to summon the new lord. 'Tis a queer world; I hope the new one will be a good master," said a man-at-arms, stupidly staring after the visitor.

"Wing the carrier-pigeon!" cried Dick. Madness for a moment had seized him. Before any one could anticipate his action, before he himself, son of a bloody age, and thoughtless beyond description, could stop to consider the ruin his action would entail, much less that it was murder and that of a king's messenger, which he was about to commit, Dick snatched an arquebus from the hand of one of Lord Darrington's men-at-arms, rested it on the shoulder of another, and fired, straight and true, at the herald going singing down the hill. The victim threw up his arms, swayed, and fell before the horror-stricken eyes of the men in the gateway.

“God’s mercy, boy, what hast thou done?” cried an old soldier, aghast.

“I don’t know,” said Dick, sobered instantly by the sight before him.

“Shut the gates; keep out his comrades! God help us! We shall all swing for your madness!” cried another.

The companions of the dead man, looking back for his coming, saw him lying as he had fallen, and rode back to raise him. When they found him dead—for Dick’s aim had been fatally true, and he had never moved—they raised a shout, and one of their number spurred up the hill and to the castle gate.

“The king shall know of your deed, my masters,” he shouted, in a fury. “He shall learn how you slay his messenger, shooting like cowards that you are. One man against so many, he on the open, you in stone walls, and that with his back toward you, so he could not see death coming from the Judases with whom he had just drunk! When we come back you shall learn what is the wrath of King Henry; that I promise you. And it shall be soon; before you’re ready. For this one corpse we shall claim the head of every man in Darrington Castle.”

Dick and his comrades watched the departure of the little band until the last of them was but a speck of light in the distance as the sunlight fell on his armor. In that band Dick knew lay bound upon a horse that which would lie forevermore a burden on his soul, for in that hour he said good-by to boyhood, and had assumed the crime and contrition of a man. And beyond the horror of his own lot he saw his lord suffering, with no hope of pardon for the wrong done by him, and the peaceful homes of the little village below in ashes by the king’s revenge.

CHAPTER III.

THE ARM OF THE KING.

DICK shook himself from the lethargy overwhelming him as the realization of what he had done and its inevitable consequences gradually grew upon him. He went slowly back to the hall he had quitted, sorrowful, it is true, but with what a different sorrow from the burden now oppressing him!

He found that, true to its nature, the bad news he brought had preceded him; it had lost no time in reaching the ear of Lord Darrington, already so afflicted. My lord raised his clouded eyes to meet Dick, and the lad ran to throw himself at his feet with a sob that burst from the very depth of his soul.

“Have you anything to say on your own behalf, Richard?” asked Lord Darrington, gravely.

Dick shook his head, speechless for an instant; then he said: “It was madness, my lord. Wrath and sorrow for the misfortunes of this day were so keen within me that, as I saw the herald departing, fury seized me, and, without a moment’s thought, I fired. It was a crime disastrous beyond my power to guess, but it was not wickedness that was planned.”

“That may, and I hope will, make it easier for you to make your peace with God, but it will not help the temporal consequences of your sin. The herald was innocent of any wrong to us; he was but the bearer of ill-tidings, doing his duty in bringing

them," said my lord, gravely. "Think you that after this there will be the slightest chance for me to get justice from the king? His messenger was shot defenseless, with his back to his foe, as he was leaving my castle, whither he had come on His Majesty's errand. If it were known that one of the villagers had fired that murderous shot, though my case would not be bettered nor I held guiltless, the entire town at our feet would be put to fire and



"Lord Darrington looked at the parchment held toward him, but did not touch it; his brows knit, and his lips compressed themselves in a hard line."

sword, both in revenge and as a warning to others to respect the majesty of the throne. And this is the more certain, that there has been so much disaffection and sedition during the late reign, and that even now the Lollards are being prosecuted with such vigor, and are stronger than they should be."

"No, my lord," cried Dick. "It is not just that you should suffer for a deed you would never have allowed could you have

foreseen it. Nor is it possible that all these innocent people, women and little children, should be made homeless, and perhaps die, for my sin. Let me go to the nearest royal representative, give myself up, and tell the truth of the matter, of which your men-at-arms are witnesses. They will hang, draw, and quarter me, but it will leave your affairs in no worse, though in no better, state than before."

"Still a dreamer, Dick," said my lord, with the shadow of a smile. "Would your one, insignificant life be sufficient forfeit, think you, for the life of a king's herald? Or the testimony of my men be received on my and their own behalf? No; your impulse goes far to atone for your wrong, but would be of no avail for me nor your unhappy fellow-townsmen. We will meet our fate together, and this horrible misfortune may make it necessary to decide upon other manner of meeting it than my first plan of non-resistance."

"The king is in London," said Dick. "Will his arm reach so far into the north and grasp us of the village, who are, as you say, so insignificant?"

"The arm of the king is long; it reaches from London, not only to us here, but into the wilds of Scotland and the fastnesses of Wales, as King Henry, when he was Prince Harry, abundantly proved," said Lord Darrington. "You will abide by my decision, of course. You will remain here in the castle, holding no communication with the village. Their complete ignorance of the crime will be the best defense of the people entrusted to me when the day of reckoning comes. It will never be known that an inmate of the castle was not the herald's murderer. It is my duty to save the humble people, who are truly my subjects, hence the

wrath of the king must be concentrated on the castle. It would be impossible for me to hold out single-handed against the forces which can be summoned against me, yet I am not certain that, with almost sure death awaiting me, and perhaps my children, it is best to give myself up. On that point I should like your counsel, Hugo, Matthew, Jude. And you, most reverend Father," he added, rising to bow to a monk who had just entered.

"I have been thinking, while you talked, of what had best be done," said Hugo, promptly. "It seems to me that there is but one course open to us. We will hold the castle against the king when the troops come. You, with the Lady Isabel and Lord Stephen, and such of your household as you select and can safely take, will escape by the rear of the castle and the secret passage under the moat, so useful in times past to your ancestors, as Matthew has often sung to us. We will hold out only long enough to ensure your escape, then we will yield, to the king's troops and to the new Lord Darrington, a castle damaged somewhat, if I am not mistaken, and less important in their eyes for being a cage from which the quarry has escaped."

"Hugo has spoken like a worthy descendant of his fathers, who were true, through varying fortunes, to this house," cried the old minstrel. "My voice is with him."

"And mine," said Father Jerome. "He has counseled as I would have done had he not anticipated me."

"Your fool could not have been wiser," said Jude. "My lord, Hugo is worthy the cap and bells. Take his advice, for Dick has spun a web from which there is no escape by unraveling it; it must e'en be cleft with your sword or it will hold you by the throat till that throat's crown, your lordly head, speaks warnings with

its mute lips to others less innocent from the gate of the Temple."

"There seems to be no dissentive voice in our little conclave," said my lord. "I had considered Hugo's plan with but slight variation, and thought within myself that none was likely to be found better. Hence it is decided. We will strengthen ourselves in those points which may need it, and provide ourselves with those essentials for our flight which we are without. Let us try," added Lord Darrington, rising, "to bear ourselves cheerfully while we wait our fate. Father Jerome, here is poor Dick, who sorely needs your ministering. Go, Dick, with Father Jerome; be shriven and do sincere penance, as I believe your contrition to be from your heart."

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Spring gave way to early summer, the hawthorn whitened the waysides, sweetened the air, and shed its blossoms, while the life of the inmates of Darrington Castle passed quietly. The time had now come when the revenge of the king might be expected. The necessary arrangements for his flight had been made by Lord Darrington. Alone, or even with his boy only in charge, he might have set out at once without waiting the more dangerous time when the royal troops should be come to take him; but encumbered with a young girl like Lady Isabel the case was different, and the escape might not be attempted until provision could be made for her safety and welfare on the journey, nor until a sanctuary had been assured her at its end.

Dick had been the messenger sent on this embassy; roads were rough in those days and travel difficult; Dick did not return to re-

port the success of his attempt until May had given place to June, and the summer month had aged a week.

Without loss of time the final preparations for departure were made. All night the castle household was busy, for in the dawn the escape was to be attempted. The party chosen to accompany my lord and his children consisted of Hugo, with four other old and faithful soldiers of the late lord, and Dame Winifred, whom it was impossible to leave behind, and whose ministrations would be needed sorely by her young charges, little desirable though it was to encumber the journey with the helplessness of women. Matthew and Jude were to remain in the castle, for Lord Darrington felt assured that family pride, if no higher motive, would assure the old harper protection, while who would harm a jester?

While it was still so dark that torches were required to light them, the unhappy exiles from their ancestral home gathered in the main hall. Jude clung to his lord's side, tears streaming down his cheeks; Matthew sat with head bowed, unable to show by outward sign the pain he bore.

"Courage, old friend," said Lord Darrington, laying his hand on Jude's heaving shoulders. "Look to the day of our meeting, and banish the thought of parting."

At that moment Hugo burst into the room, and strode toward Lord Darrington and Jude, a damp parchment extended in his left hand, excitement expressed in every motion of his muscles.

"See, my lord, what the men found affixed to the main gate," he cried. "The hour has come; they have been here in the night, and to-day, at any moment, we shall be summoned to open to them. Oh, if you had but gone three days ago!"

Lord Darrington looked at the parchment held toward him, but did not touch it; his brows knit, and his lips compressed themselves in a hard line; Jude bent forward to gaze at it, his hands clasped, his lips parted as if to implore mercy of the insensate thing. It was a proclamation sealed with the royal arms declaring Lord Darrington traitor, and calling for the submission of Darrington Castle to the royal troops on their demand.

"This proves it thrice time we were starting," said my lord, at last. He held out his hand to Jude, then to Matthew; both fell on their knees to kiss it; no word was spoken. Dame Winifred entered, leading Lord Stephen. The child looked frightened yet elated; adventure on any terms is full of delightful possibilities to childhood. Lady Isabel, veiled and wrapped in a cloak, followed; for her there was no illusion in the prospect that lay before her. Both gave their hands to be kissed by the jester and minstrel; Isabel lifted her veil and kissed the wrinkled forehead of the old man whose songs of happier times had soothed her father's childhood, like her own.

Only subdued sobbing was heard as the little band of fugitives turned from the hall. Followed by Hugo, in complete silence, they slipped like shadows down the dark stairway and turned toward the rear of the castle.

Hardly had they gone when Thomas Archer, Hugo's lieutenant, to whom had been confided the task of holding the castle for a few hours to give his master a start against certain pursuit, heard the blast of a trumpet outside the walls, and looking from the battlement saw an armored figure on horseback gazing up at him, while a second had ridden close to the walls, and was calling forth the inmates in the vigorous trumpet-blasts he had heard.



*"Looking from the battlement saw an armored figure on horseback
gazing up at him."*

“Surrender!” cried the further one, on seeing Thomas’ head above the coping. “Last night the demand of the king for possession of this treacherous hole which dares to slay his messengers was affixed to your gate. Open, and yield up your traitor lord, or we will blast castle and inmates, for we are not disposed nor instructed to parley.”

“By false villains has His Majesty been deceived,” returned Thomas, stoutly. “We will hold the castle against you and all comers, proving our lord’s innocence of your charges by might until he has opportunity to prove them by right of law.”

“You defy me?” cried the captain of the king’s force.

“I defy you!” responded Thomas, curtly.

“Then God have mercy on your souls. Call up the troops!” ordered the captain, wheeling.

By the time the sun was well up three pieces of ordnance had been placed at intervals around the castle, and a considerable body of troops stood ready for the assault.

On the other side all had been made ready for the attack; drawbridges were up, the moat was flooded by the crude engineering of the period, and behind battlements and within towers men long practised in the use of the bow and arquebus were stationed to do their best to prolong resistance for the protection of the castle’s fleeing lord. The assault opened the charge with a swift flight of arrows, harmless to the protected defenders, who replied in kind, doing more havoc to the men below than in the open. Evidently the assailants felt wisely that it was vain to hope to accomplish much by means of attack on men behind strong walls; their hope lay in weakening those walls; on this they bent all their energies. Selecting a postern gate as feebler than the main one,

the ordnance was trained upon it, while a mine was laid under the supporting walls on either side.

. The Norman forebears of the Darringtons fighting under William Rufus had found time to build well the home of their future race; again and again was the mine sprung, repeatedly the ordnance thundered against the stones, yet though rock was displaced the old wall remained firm, and the sun mounted higher, and every hour was a gain.

Nor were the guns of the castle idle; many of the king's men had fallen, and lay groaning in the cool shade of the thicket where their comrades had laid them.

Noon came, and the heat was greater than is usual at that season. Worn and exasperated by the castle's defiance, the captain brought up all his ordnance to the same point, laid a shorter and more powerful mine than the preceding ones, and prepared for a triumphant charge. The train was fired, and just as the spark crept up to the mine, with a dreadful roar the three pieces of ordnance belched forth destruction.

The postern gate tottered, swung. With a shout, brandishing their axes, the assailants sprang upon it and effected the breach, through which they swarmed with angry cries. It had been no part of Thomas Archer's instructions to hold out against the impossible nor to cause useless bloodshed. When the breach was effected he came forward and gave his sword into the captain's hands, craving mercy for his men. And just as Darrington Castle fell, the party of the new Lord Darrington, coming to take possession, was seen approaching up the hill.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM CASTLE TO TOWER.

WHILE the assault upon Darrington Castle had held his enemies' attention, as had been devised, Lord Darrington had employed every moment for his own safety and that of his children. A secret passage led under the moat, and thence a course ran by devious paths, some of which were subterranean and others thickly wooded, down to the bank of the river. Lest there might be troops surrounding the castle, this had been the course chosen for the unfortunate earl's escape; swiftly, and without a word, the nine souls making up the little band of fugitives wound their way through the narrow passage choked with the undisturbed dust of a hundred years. And behind them, unseen and unheard, crept two others, whose hearts were bent on taking this journey, the end of which no man could foretell.

The long, moldy passage under the moat, lighted only by the torches, which served to frighten away the rats and other vermin no less than to guide the wanderers' feet, was full of horrors, but only Stephen dwelt consciously on the immediate surroundings. To the rest they served but as a background to future hardships, and even Isabel, for all her youth and delicate girlishness, passed through the loathsome way half-insensible to the fear and disgust she felt, her mind filled with apprehensions of what lay before her.

At last the entire distance was traversed, the last hidden path

left behind them, and the fugitives came out into the open meadow skirting the river bank. A small boat with a sail similar to the modern sprit-sail lay in readiness, moored to a stake on the shore; toward her the little party at once turned their steps, followed closely by Dick and Jude, who for the first time were revealed to the others, having kept well behind, shielded from sight by the shadows through which they were passing, until now. Lord Darrington, supporting Isabel on his arm, and accompanied by Hugo, led the way to the embarkation; close upon their heels came the jester, as yet undiscovered, for Lord Darrington's eyes were bent on the ground. Isabel raised hers toward heaven, and Hugo was engrossed in expatiating to his master on the charms, safety, and speed of the little craft, striving to give a tone of cheerfulness to a moment profoundly sad to them all.

Just as Isabel was about to step, first of all, on the boat, Jude pulled her father's sleeve. "My lord, my lord," he said: "You will not leave me?"

Lord Darrington paused, turned, and saw, not only Jude, but Dick, following slowly after his fellow conspirator.

"How is this?" he said. "I bade you both stay, yet you have come. Surely you are mad to risk our discovery for the sake of a second farewell."

"I don't mean to say farewell, my lord," said Dick, stoutly, plucking up heart to make his request now that he was discovered. "I am strong, young, and can serve you well. I am guilty of a great sin, and I want to make reparation. I am half-afraid it will not be accounted for me if I go with you, because I should be wretched left behind, and yet I dare hope that if I, who plunged you deeper in misfortune, do all I can for you now, the good God



"Lord Darrington, supporting Isabel on his arm, led the way."



will let me be useful to you, since He sees the heart, and knows that I should be happy if He would let me die for you."

Lord Darrington could not listen unmoved to the pathos of the simple sincerity of this speech; he held out his hand, saying: "I am not used to change my mind, Dick, and I ordered you to stay at the castle, yet I am not able to resist you; considering the plea you make, and the ground of your desire, I dare not deny you. Come, then, and Heaven protect us all as you would protect me."

"And will you be less kind to your old servant, my lord?" cried Jude. "Take me with you; these lips can never jest again, these eyes see humor if they must look on interlopers of a false line striding the halls of Darrington as its lords. My occupation will be gone, yet for the first time shall I be verily a fool, since he is wise who jests at life. Ah, dear my lord, my heart will break; I love you. I can not be useful, but let that be my plea; I can not stay without you, for I love you."

Tears stood in Lord Darrington's eyes as Jude fell on the grass, seizing his cloak in both hands to kiss it. "Jude, dear old friend, my comfort from my boyhood, whose merriness was but a cloak for deepest feeling, for truth and tenderness, can you doubt that it is a bitter thing to me to leave you? Believe me, it is not that I do not want you, that I shall not long for you, but because I love you I must beg you to return to wait the day that brings me back to you. We have no room for any but those who can handle a gun if need be. You are no fighter, Jude, and it would but add to my burdens to feel you were with us. Come, smile once more, dear old jester! Don't make this hour too hard to bear. Do you think it would be a home-coming to me if, when the king has righted me, I did not see you and Matthew first as I rode up the

hill? I ask it as a favor, Jude; go home. My cousins will be good to you; make friends with them to serve me if you have opportunity, and wait in Darrington Castle till we meet again."

"We shall never meet," murmured Jude, hoarsely. "I will do your will. Farewell, then, dearest master, dear, dear children. My jests are over, for this day will weight my heart. It is a parting forever, between us, at least, John of Darrington, and I can only wait your eternal coming home." He turned to go, bent over with the shaking sobs that seemed especially tragic coming from merry Jude. A foreboding silence, sorrow that could not be surmounted, fell upon them all as they watched the jester's retreating figure. Shaking off his oppression by an effort, Lord Darrington turned again, saying: "Come, friend, for moments are precious."

But at that instant the tall figure of Father Jerome, in his Benedictine habit, came swiftly down the meadow, and Isabel, snatching Stephen's hand, ran to meet him.

"Bless us, Father," she sobbed, falling on her knees before him. "Bless us, and oh, pray for us, for how and when shall we see these dear fields again?"

"You will see them, dear child, but with eyes no longer unacquainted with grief. Bear what you are to meet like the daughter of your fathers, like the daughter of Almighty God. Keep your heart pure, your trust unfaltering, and remember you can bear what is appointed you, for God will sustain you. Be noble in soul, worthy your name and your faith, and one day you will return to be lady of Darrington.

"And you, my little boy, keep your innocence, to render it unsullied to God. Do not forget when the hour comes that heaven is better than earthly glories, and the title of the saints than to

be Lord Darrington. Farewell, dear charges whom I love. God bless you with His power, as I do in my weakness !”

The priest extended his hands over the fair head of the boy and the coif covering Isabel’s beautiful hair. She listened to his words, her heart heavier than before, for Father Jerome was accounted a saint among the people, and said to have the gift of prophecy, and in his words she read a hint that her beloved little brother’s short race would soon be run.

“Go, my children, your father must not be delayed,” said the priest, raising them. “He and I parted last night. I will not add to the solemn words then spoken. Here I will watch your setting forth, and my love and my prayers will follow every foot of your Calvary.”

Rendered more sorrowful, if that were possible, by Father Jerome’s words, yet stilled by their solemnity and sustained by their appeal to the highest motives, human and divine, Isabel arose, and, taking Stephen’s hand, returned to her father’s side. With no more delay they embarked. The little craft was already provisioned with food for three days, at the end of which time, if ever, they must have reached their refuge. Isabel and Dame Winifred were seated in the stern, facing Hugo and Dick, who were appointed their particular guardians. Lord Darrington kept Stephen with him in the bow ; between these divisions of the family sat the four men-at-arms, who were to defend them in case of necessity, or row them should the wind fail. A light but steady breeze had risen with the sun, and when her painter was hauled in the little boat leaped out into the stream to meet it as if she were rejoicing to be free, and understood that on her best effort hung the precious lives she carried.

The plan decided upon was to make progress down the river southward, as far as was possible by water, to Glastonbury, where, through the influence of Father Jerome, Lord Darrington could be safely hidden, or, if need be, transported to France. At the abbey, if it were reached safely, Isabel would be met by an escort which would convey her to her aunt, who was Superior over a community of Benedictine nuns in an abbey south of Rouen. Arrangements had been made that horses, with a sufficient escort, were to meet Lord Darrington's party at the terminal of the river courses over which they were to pass. For this, as for most of the plan laid for their rescue, they were indebted to the power and the widespread connections of the Benedictine Order, through the mediation of Father Jerome.

The wind with which they set out held throughout the entire day, and, except for a necessary landing to build a fire and cook their noon-day meal, they made the best possible use of it, so that at nightfall they were far on their way, and had left York well behind them. The journey through the beautiful June day, past the smiling banks of the river, the green fields stretching beyond having the characteristic loveliness of England of the present day, would have been delightful save that the eyes of each of those in the boat (unless Stephen be excepted), speeding on so pleasantly, looked on the fair picture unseeing.

At night they encamped beside the bank, sleeping but little, and early dawn found them once more setting forth. The wind had shifted during the night, and the course of the second day had to be made by tacking, and was in consequence, far slower. Late in the afternoon a small party of horsemen was seen in the distance, apparently reconnoitering. They were from the north,

and the sight of them filled the occupants of the boat with uneasiness.

Camp was made with special care that night; though the others had been able to convince themselves that the band of horsemen they had seen had no connection with their fortunes, Lord Darrington and Isabel, who remembered with dismay the prophetic words of both Father Jerome and the jester in parting, were less



"But at that instant the tall figure of Father Jerome, in his Benedictine habit, came swiftly down the meadow, and Isabel, snatching Stephen's hand, ran to meet him."

easy in dismissing the subject from their minds. Owing to this fact Lord Darrington arranged that his daughter and Dame Winifred, with Hugo to guard them, should lie on the river bank. In case of alarm Hugo was to make at once for the boat with the two women, and try under cover of darkness to slip away with Isabel into safety. Once again he kept Stephen with himself; on the boy hung the hopes of the legitimate line of Darringtons; perhaps this was why the father could not bear to entrust his safety to another.

The larger number of this little party, consisting of the five men, Lord Darrington, and the boy, lay for the night some two hundred feet farther inshore than Lady Isabel, her attendant, and Hugo; in case of danger it would reach the inland position first.

Shortly before midnight a crackling of twigs warned the sentry that some one was approaching. He challenged, but there was no response. It was dark under the trees, and he tried in vain to make out a figure under their shade. Raising his arquebus he fired; it was the signal for a sudden tumult.

Lord Darrington sprang to his feet, thrust Stephen into a barricade of dry branches prepared for such an occasion, and took his stand before the child. As he did so, and as Dick and his other four men leaped up, weapons ready, twenty men burst through the trees from three sides, calling upon Lord Darrington to surrender in the king's name.

"By what right do you summon me to surrender to you, unless it be that you outnumber us by more than thrice as many?" demanded the earl. He had glanced over his shoulder, and saw that Hugo and Winifred were carrying out by force the orders he had given in regard to his daughter, who, seeing her father in danger, strove frantically to free herself from her friends and get to him, regardless of herself or his desires.

"A little time will be required to get her off," thought Lord Darrington, and resolved to gain it by parleying. "Are you outlaws, or who and what are you, who use the king's name with somewhat too great freedom?"

"Outlaws? We are the king's men, who, when we had taken Darrington Castle—for it is now in our hands and your cousin its

lord—when we had made your impudent garrison surrender, and found you fled, rode after you in hot haste, and will carry you to London to rot in the Tower in fulfilment of His Majesty's commands."

"I have no proof that you are from the king," retorted Lord Darrington. "Thank God they have got her off at last," he thought, glancing toward the shore. "I am outnumbered, but a brave man sells his liberty dear. I will not surrender."

"Then have at you!" cried the leader, with an oath, thrusting suddenly with his naked sword at the earl.

But Lord Darrington, scholarly though his tastes, had been bred to arms, and was as expert a swordsman as any in the kingdom. He parried the thrust with his broadsword, and by a quick turn inserted his blade in the visor of his opponent's helmet, and might have pierced his brain, but stayed his hand.

Generosity was wasted on the men with whom the earl's party had to deal. So far from being grateful for the clemency that spared his life, the man was furious, and set upon Lord Darrington like a wild beast. In the mean time, seeing that battle was the order of the day, or, more properly, the night, each of Lord Darrington's little band of followers had engaged with an opponent, Dick, with the best heart in the world, throwing himself into the scrimmage with such fury that for a few moments it actually looked as though superiority in zeal and spirit might make up for inferiority of numbers. This encouraging illusion could not last, however; three to one were odds too heavy to admit of more than a brief apparent victory. The hope that Lord Darrington entertained of slipping away through the trees, and thus escaping in the darkness, was doomed to speedy extinction. In a short time all four of

his men-at-arms lay disarmed, two of them wounded, on the soft moss. True, there were several of their foes groaning and bleeding on the ground, but at least fourteen were whole and sound, while of Lord Darrington's party only he and Dick were still upon their feet and fighting. It took six men to overpower the earl, who fought as only desperate men can fight who see their last hope vanishing. Breathless and panting he felt his sword wrenched from him, while arms and legs, wound in unknown ways around his own, forced him to the earth.

"Yield, you traitorous devil!" cried one, roughly, with a kick and an oath. "The evil one has fought with you this night."

"I don't yield; I am overpowered," gasped Lord Darrington. "Traitor was I never. Keep a civil tongue when you speak to a peer of the realm."

"You're no peer; you're not only made a commoner like us, but lower than us, for we are true men, while you are a traitor," growled his captor. "Do you think 'twill mend your case that you fight the king's men come to take you, and resist the law?"

"You have me a prisoner, but I am not reduced to discussing my affairs with such as you," retorted my lord proudly, while his eyes anxiously sought out Dick and the spot where Stephen lay hidden.

Dick had sprung back when he saw his lord captive, and planting his back against a tree resolved to fight to the last gasp, more well than wisely, since the result was inevitable. In that advantageous position he managed to do considerable further damage, and laid about him with a valor which rendered it no slight task to rush in and disarm him. Indeed, one or two attempting it had retired with a broken head, and for a breathing space the honors

of war were with Dick. In that space of time Lord Darrington's captor, seeing his anxious glance, bethought himself of the child.

"Where is the young cockerel?" he cried. "May I be burned eternally if I didn't forget him!"

Guided by that involuntary look of the poor lord, the miscreant went straight to the spot where the boy lay, sword upraised, and with an oath swore to slay him. Lord Darrington tore at the bonds with which he had been bound, in vain. But Dick, leaping forward, cleft with one blow the head of the would-be murderer, and as he did so received a thrust in the back which entered the impetuous, contrite, and loving heart, stilling it forever.

Stephen was dragged from his hiding-place, but with the death of their leader better counsels prevailed among the earl's assailants. The prisoners were made ready for slow transport to London, the child among them; perhaps even the captors had had enough of bloodshed.

The Tower lay before Lord Darrington, but Isabel was still free and Stephen saved. Poor Dick, left face downward among the leaves of last winter and the sweet blossoms of the summer, had paid the price of blood, had made the expiation he desired to pay.

CHAPTER V.

A BRIEF TENURE.

THE doors of the vanquished castle had swung open to receive the new lord of Darrington, who, with his retinue, came up just in time to see it surrender to the force sent by the king to instate him. Besides his sufficient escort of armed followers, this retinue consisted of his two sons, one, the elder, Guy, being somewhat past twenty, and the younger, Alain, a tall, slender stripling who had shot up to a height which made his delicate frame look even more attenuated and his boyish, thoughtful face appear younger than his eighteen years. These sons, the only surviving children of Sir Gaspar Darrington—for it is pleasanter to give him the title he bore in Warwickshire than the new one he unjustly claimed—rode on his either hand. Their father's stern face was lighted by an expression of fierce triumph, but both youths were down-cast; there was nothing in their air nor expression that indicated any joy in coming to take possession of their cousins' estates and title.

At the rear of the little procession rode a lady, no longer young, but in that pleasant period of Indian summer pause which precedes the coming on of age. Her veil was thrown back, the better to see the beauty around her, and her face, endowed by nature with great beauty, was so sweetened by gentle thoughts and good deeds that it was impossible to look on her without feeling

her charm. That she was the mother of the two lads at Sir Gaspar's side was evident at a glance, as was also evident that they had been fortunate enough to inherit her nature rather than their father's, and that it was highly probable her influence and training, rather than his, had shaped their characters. Beside, and immediately behind Lady Margaret, rode a number of women forming her household, who, taking their cue from their lady, did not join in the triumphant shout set up by Sir Gaspar and the men as they passed under the great gate thrown open to receive them.

The first days of the new conditions of things at the castle were confused and hurried. The breaches made in the strong old walls had to be put in condition to resist attack in case of possible attempt to recapture it, for Lord Darrington had many friends in the north, a section famous from all time for its fearless recklessness.

Who could say that, Lord Darrington escaped and still at large, there might not come a force, with him at its head, to seize his rights by might of arms, despite the king and injustice? It was not until tidings of the fugitive lord's capture reached the castle that its new inmate breathed easily; with Lord Darrington once in the Tower of London he had good reason to believe that he was safe forever from the cousin he had wronged.

It was not until this news arrived that the tenants and dependents of the deposed lord came forward to make terms with the powers that were. They loved Lord Darrington, and would gladly have been faithful to him, but necessity breeds sycophants; if their lord was indeed gone from them forever, they must live, and how could they live save by the grace of the newcomer? So, cap in hand, one by one each humbly came to make his obeisance

to fate in the person of Sir Gaspar. All but a few, who sullenly held aloof, marked by that relentless man for punishment when more pressing affairs allowed him to attend to the establishment of his authority.

And among those who were to feel the weight of his displeasure was Jude, the jester, who frowned on him and mocked his orders like a man defiant from despair—one to whom his own fate was supremely indifferent. Matthew, the minstrel, older, with the fires of life spent, bowed to his grief and passed unnoted.

Scarce eight days had passed since the gate of Darrington Castle had admitted its new lord, when there appeared one morning, riding up the hill, a knight with plumed helmet and bright armor sparkling in the sunshine. With him rode two others of like degree, and behind the three another three, evidently squires. Straight up the hill they came, bound unquestionably to the castle, but whether as friends or foes no one could predict.

“Close the gates; let no one pass till we know his errand!” ordered Sir Gaspar. “If there be but six they may enter, whatever their errand, but there may be a ruse in this apparently harmless band coming openly in the full light of day; it is our wisdom to be cautious, with enemies and disaffection surrounding us.”

Obedient to these commands the great gate swung to, was bolted and barred just as the strangers halted, and one of the squires blew a trumpet blast announcing their arrival. Not receiving an immediate answer to this message, the knight in advance turned in his saddle with the motion of one who had not learned the art of waiting, and motioned to the squires to knock on the gates. With the heartiest good-will in the world, two of the three

attendants dismounted and sprang forward, one of them dealing a tremendous blow with his ax on the iron-bound oak.

A warder leaning down from above hailed him.

"Who are you, and what is your errand?" he demanded, angrily. "You show scant courtesy. Is it your custom to batter the walls of each and every castle you pass, regardless of whether you are at peace or war with its lord?"



"With the heartiest good-will in the world, two of the three attendants dismounted and sprang forward, one of them dealing a tremendous blow with his ax on the iron-bound oak."

"And is it your custom to sleep at noonday, that you can not hear a trumpet-blast that would wake them sleeping at Ephesus?" retorted the other. "Here is a noble lord who would speak with Sir Gaspar Darrington."

"Lord Gaspar Darrington, so please you," returned that gentleman's follower. "What is your business with him?"

"The business is mine, good fellow," said the knight who had

given the order to knock at the gate. "I have ridden down from farther north to propose a trial of courage and arms to your lord, which, if report say true of him, he will not refuse. Tell him that a knight, nameless for the nonce, but of station equal, at least, to his own, and whose metal hath been tried, would speak with him."

"Have you ridden with other companions than those I see? My lord has reason to doubt the fidelity of some in this northern country, and will not open unless he is secure from an ambush," said the man on the wall.

"Reason to do more than doubt," muttered the knight, in his visor. Then aloud he said: "None has come with me, nor knows of my coming, save these five you see; there is no ambush and no design back of my demand than that I will make plain to him."

The man disappeared, and after a short time the bolts were heard creaking in their bars, and the gate swung open enough to allow the riders to pass in single file into the first court. Here the six dismounted, and, giving their horses into the hands ready to receive them, they followed their leaders; the squires to join the men in the servants' hall, the three knights to mount to the great hall where Lord Darrington and his daughter had learned of their coming misfortunes.

Sir Gaspar was seated in Lord Darrington's chair; the knight, whose figure and bearing showed him to be much younger than the usurper of the castle, laid his hand involuntarily on his sword-hilt, as if the sight of the black-browed figure lolling in the true lord's seat angered him.

After a moment's halt he advanced toward this figure and said: "Sir Gaspar Darrington—for I will not salute you by a

title rightfully worn by a better man"—he paused a moment, and his voice sounded hoarse and thick—"Indeed, still borne by him—since the king has bestowed it on you but through misinformation, and will return it to that rightful claimant—"

"Who are you that dare insult me on my own hearth?" shouted Sir Gaspar, starting up.

"Truth is not insult, Sir Gaspar, though no insult stings so keenly," returned the other, quietly. "I am prepared, nay, I have come to make good my words. As to who I am, I am a peer of the realm, your superior in birth; thank God, in honor, also. I am a friend, many years his junior, of that good and upright gentleman, Lord Darrington. I accuse you, his kinsman, of perfidy to him. I accuse you of plotting to get his estates and title by making him appear traitor to the king. And I accuse you of forging the proofs and buying the perjured witnesses by which, and by whom, you have succeeded with His Majesty in attaining your ends.

"But I exonerate from more than suspicion of your crimes, and of the slightest participation in them, your sons, who are not yours in heart, and the noble lady who is your wife." So saying, the young knight bowed deeply toward the other side of the hall, where Lady Margaret and her sons were seated.

Shame and fear clutching their hearts that their worst suspicions of the man they called husband and father were about to be verified by this stranger, who spoke with the assurance of perfect knowledge, made Lady Margaret seize a hand of each of her sons, and prevented the latter from moving hand, foot, or tongue to their father's assistance.

Sir Gaspar had fallen back in his chair and stared at the knight, rage, terror, amazement chasing each other over his pur-

pling face; a slight foam gathered on his lips; he tried to speak, but his tongue was powerless.

The stranger continued: "I have come hither to tell you this, and to challenge you, as the champion of the man you have wronged, to make good on your person the statements I have made. That Lord Darrington will be righted I am certain, but justice is slow, and God will let my arm be the means to avenge one who has shown me and mine much kindness in days gone by. Sir Gaspar Darrington, you are a thief, a liar, a forger, treacherous to your blood, deceitful to your king. There lies my glove. Pick it up, and let us try in mortal combat whether truth is with you or with me; coward you are not."

Lady Margaret covered her face with her hands. Long had she known that the man she had married was not the man she could have loved and trusted; faithfully had she watched and guarded, that her children should not grow like him. Now the words she listened to fell on her ears like a knell, and she knew that, whether he lived or died, she was widowed indeed.

"Not a word, Guy, Alain," she whispered. "It is your father's quarrel. It is not for you to interfere between the judgments of Almighty God." For the good lady shared the belief of her day, that in a solemn appeal to God to prove the right the termination of a combat was the revelation of His will.

The word "coward" seemed to arouse Sir Gaspar from his impotence. It was with a deep oath that he started up, raised the mailed glove from the floor where the knight had cast it, and said hoarsely: "Follow me!"

"Make your peace with God, be shriven; I will wait your pleasure," said the young stranger. "As you know your guilt, so



"When the last words were read, the air was rent with cheers."

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you know what the termination of our encounter must be, and I would not send you into eternity with such crimes upon your soul."

"I'll tear your soul out of your body if you speak again," growled Sir Gaspar, with a livid face, advancing a step, with his hands crooked like a wild beast's claws.

"Father, let me go with you," cried Guy, springing forward.

"Come, if you will," muttered his father. Lady Margaret did not move; Alain kept at her side, her hands, cold and fluttering, held fast in his own. Without a word to either, Sir Gaspar moved away, Guy pressing after him, and the stranger's spurs clanking on the stone floor as he followed.

Sir Gaspar led the way to an enclosed court on the north side of the castle. It was fifty feet square, stone-paved, with a low wall, against which the heirs of Darrington for generations had played at ball, but which, in the course of its history, had already looked on less peaceful scenes.

In their passage through the castle Sir Gaspar had summoned two of his men to attend him and see that justice was accorded him; the two knights who had come with the challenger accompanied the stranger, to do like service for him.

Not a word was spoken as Sir Gaspar donned the light armor customary in foot combats, while Lord Darrington's champion divested himself of his heavier pieces. Short swords were the weapon; the stranger, ready first, played with his as he waited, his wrist as light yet strong as any one could have desired his champion's wrist to be. Sir Gaspar was manifestly nervous. No one could accuse him of cowardice in his cruel yet daring career; perhaps conscience was making a coward of him for the first time, or perhaps he felt that the tall, lithe young stranger, with God to

enforce his appeal to justice, was too strong for his arm to vanquish.

At last he was ready. "Darrington! Daring! On!" he cried, using the old war-cry of his race, but his lips were dry and the voice that uttered it was hoarse.

"God and the right!" cried the stranger, his voice ringing out in the echoing court.

From the first thrust the combat was deadly. Sir Gaspar fought desperately, lunging forward to pierce the openings in the young man's armor. His opponent was quiet, parrying, thrusting with the lithe grace of a cat. His combat was defensive, not offensive, at the start; not a thrust of Sir Gaspar's got home, yet as he parried he contrived to make an occasional move which nearly made Sir Gaspar's blood flow, and drove him to fury, manifestly decreasing his power.

"Have a care, Sir Gaspar; go slowly!" cried one of his men, as a wild lunge on his part, missing its mark, left his raised arm undefended, and the point of Lord Darrington's champion's sword grazed his side.

Guy neither spoke nor moved. All the dark memories of his childhood, all the growing disapproval of his father felt in his dawning manhood, all the horrible doubts of his course in regard to their cousins in the past few months, passed swiftly before him; like his mother, he felt it was an appeal to arms, and to omniscient Justice.

Sir Gaspar was plainly losing all self-control; he breathed heavily, his thrusts fell each time wider of their mark. Suddenly his opponent drew himself up to his full height, grasped his sword closer to the blade, and assumed the offensive. His blows rained

with lightning speed, sure as they were swift; Sir Gaspar found his own defense almost beyond his skill. The stranger closed in upon him, shortening the range at every blow. The onlookers held their breath; the end was near, inevitable.

At last it came. A quick, rapid feint toward the right, followed by a deadly thrust to the left, pierced Sir Gaspar's throat, glancing downward till the short sword was buried two-thirds to its hilt.

"Yield, villain!" cried the stranger, throwing up his visor, and speaking for the first time. Sir Gaspar sank on his right arm, his sword fell from his fingers, the left hand clutched agonizedly at the neck of his shirt of mail, and he raised dying eyes to look at the face of him who had avenged his sin.

"Robert Aymond!" he gasped.

"Robert Aymond, lord of Carnaymond, grandson of your grandsire's friend," assented the young knight. "He was true to Darrington as you were false; it was fitting that mine should be the hand to wreak the justice of Heaven upon you."

"Enough, young sir; it is wrought, he is dying. Leave him to me, priest and chirurgeon," said Father Jerome, whom one of the men had hastily fetched. "Leave us! And you, Sir Guy, summon your mother and your brother."

"Come with me, sir. You have slain my father, but you shall have the courtesy you merit. Your challenge was open, you have fought well; we bow to the will of Heaven," said Guy. And he and Lord Robert left the court together.

When the sun rose again Sir Gaspar was dead, and Guy was, by force of circumstances, lord over Darrington. The champion of Lord Darrington had ridden away at sunset; the castle lay silent under the tragedy enacted within its walls.

At noon the town's people climbed the hill, and the inmates of the castle gathered at the main entrance to hear read to them the proclamation setting forth the death of their new lord, and the accession of his son to the title of Lord Guy.

Those who had hesitated from acclaiming the dead man who had usurped the title felt that Providence had supplied them with a solution to their difficulties in the person of his son. When the last words were read, and the pause which followed them had rested over the assembly for a moment, the air was rent with cheers for the new lord.

Young, untried, handsome, with the goodness of his mother in his looks, Guy stood before them bowing. "Hurrah for Lord Guy! Heaven bless the young lord!" cried men and women together, throwing up hands, caps, and kerchiefs in the air.

"I will do my faithful best to be a good lord to you," said the youth, simply.

And thus the lordship of Darrington passed again into new hands.

"But it shall not be for long," said Guy, watching the crowd melt away toward their homes. He leaned heavily on his brother's shoulder as he spoke, for his heart was heavy within him.

CHAPTER VI.

A KNIGHTLY ENTERPRISE.

THE young Sir Guy, who had so suddenly and tragically succeeded to the honor his father had filched from his cousins, having been proclaimed and accepted as lord over Darrington, showed, as days went by, no less heaviness of heart than at first.

The problem to the solution of which he set his keen young wits, cordially seconded by his mother and brother, was not how to strengthen his position, but how most speedily to right the wrong that had been done, reinstate the legitimate earl, and return to his own baronetcy in Warwickshire. That Lord Darrington had been captured he knew, and subsequent reports said that Stephen, but not Isabel, had been taken with him to London. The young girl had escaped; what was the fate of any of the family the occupants of the castle did not know, but there was good reason to fear that the punishment falling on the head of the innocent man accused of treason would be swift and severe.

Father Jerome, taken into the counsels as to the best way to reach the king's ear, had offered to ride to London, first stopping at one or two abbeys of his Order most powerful to aid them, and thus bring to bear on King Henry the influence of the Benedictines, backed by the written plea of Sir Guy and Lady Margaret to reinstate their cousin. If necessary, they were resolved to get from Lord Robert Aymond the proofs which they all believed he

possessed of the wrong committed by Sir Gaspar; so thoroughly in earnest in making restitution were all three of his survivors that, rather than perpetuate the wrong by which they were then innocently profiting, they would sacrifice Sir Gaspar's good name, if it was required of them, to bring the right about.

But hoping to avoid this exposure of the crimes of the dead, Father Jerome had ridden away to set in motion the great influence of the bishops, priests, and monks of the vast Benedictine Order, of which he was a member of no little repute, being himself certain, it was said, to succeed to an important bishopric.

News traveled slowly in those days; it was not known in the castle that, even as Father Jerome passed through its gates on his errand, the king was embarking for that tremendous campaign in France which was to end in Agincourt.

Life in the castle moved on somewhat dully after he had gone. The young heir found his hours filled and his wisdom taxed in the administration of the affairs of his new estate, duties he performed with the more anxious conscientiousness that he felt he was but acting as Lord Darrington's steward; in these matters he was guided by the rare wisdom of his mother, a woman as prudent yet brave as any king's counselor, and far more unselfish than the majority of them who take part in politics.

Alain, during these days, was left much to himself. Always something of a dreamer, yet with the love of adventure common to his race in his veins, he had been a puzzle to his elder brother, who was formed to be wholly a man of action. Though to his mother he was, if such a thing could be to a woman as just as she, the favorite of her two sons.

In the northwestern corner of the castle there was a room open-

ing upon a sheltered garden which a century earlier had been the apartment of the Countess of Darrington. Tradition said that she was fair both in mind and body, but that her husband, years her senior, distrusted her, and in a fit of mad jealousy one day slew her. Remorse and tardy justice to her innocence drove him half mad; he had died on a penitential pilgrimage to Rome, leaving



“The excitement of the past hour shone in his eyes; before he had spoken, Lady Margaret caught the alarm and flew to her elder son, certain that the younger had evil tidings to communicate.”

all of his unentailed estate to charity in expiation. It was said that the shade of the unhappy lady walked by times in the garden and in the room where she had lived and died so sadly. In the course of time a tale had grown up, based on the reports of those who claimed to have seen the vision, that a figure white-clad, of course—veiled, yet showing a blanched face beneath the veil—went wringing its hands up and down the deserted garden, and sobbed

to the drear walls of the old-time boudoir, and that the apparition, after the fashion of all family specters, appeared but in the hour of misfortune, or to announce calamity to the Darringtons.

The place of these unhappy wanderings was avoided by all in the castle, whether of high or low degree, but the tale had an extraordinary fascination for Alain, and, far from avoiding its reputed scene, he lingered much in the room and the garden where his ancestor had committed the crime which had made a specter of his unfortunate wife. With awe-struck curiosity, half desire, half fear, he often sought the haunted chamber; that the dead could, and sometimes did, return to the world of flesh he never doubted.

One night, two weeks after his father's death, he sat, as was his wont just at dusk, in a corner of the garden even more densely overgrown with the heavy, down-drooping branches of the trees and tall, tangled undergrowth, than was the rest of the neglected spot. The day was sultry, hints of a coming thunder-storm were in the air; it had grown dark early, and Alain had ceased playing the lute with which he whiled away his idle hours, and the little instrument lay neglected on his knee.

Suddenly he saw a gleam beneath the trees shading the fountain, a gleam which, as he gazed, developed into a tall figure, all in white, with something like a soft white veil floating on its shoulders. Alain's heart stood still; he never doubted that he had before him the ghost of Lady Darrington. Misfortunes had surely crowded about the house of late, sufficient to warrant her return if misfortune was what called her forth.

The courage, such as it was, with which he had looked forward to the possibility of seeing the spirit, oozed from his finger-tips as he saw it steadily advancing upon him. Terror held him its

prisoner; he could not have moved to have saved his life, and he had not sufficient control over his cold lips to murmur the prayer which rose to them. The specter came on and on; Alain heard a sound as of singing, and in a few moments recognized words. To his bewilderment the voice uttering them was that of a man, feeble and quavering, but a man's, singing in a low, melancholy cadence like a dirge. Were there then two ghosts, and what was this awful visitor from another world chanting?

Alain listened intently, the cold sweat standing on his brow, and heard something that was unmistakably a dirge for the lord of Darrington:

“How is his glory fallen!

The proud head bowed how low!

Not so.

Raised is the proud head, a mark for scorn;

Ah, woe the dark hour that I was born!

The lofty oak is stricken,

The clouds around it thicken;

The hawks of Darrington shall soar

No more, no more, no more!

“Crowds pass by with gibing;

The proud head hears nor heeds:

Black deeds!

Hark, the cry of the child in the night!

The ewe lamb flees from the wolves in fright;

Her love, her life in ashes.

The tempest 'round her dashes,

The shout of ‘*Daring! On!*’ shall roar

To succor her no more, no more.”

In spite of the profound sadness of the singular chant, with its varied rhythm and hopeless refrain, Alain felt that in the last "no more" there was the suggestion of an interrogation, an appeal to himself that made part of the terror with which he had listened give way to curiosity. He half arose from his seat, and as he did so the white figure advanced toward him, revealing himself as no spirit, but old Matthew, the minstrel.

Alain was so surprised, the relief was so great, that he could not speak, and the old man raised his arm, himself breaking the silence which had fallen after his last note had died away.

"Your father will meet the man he wronged before the judgment-seat of God ere the sun has twice set," he said. "The tree is stricken; the branch is withering with it. The slender blossom is left alone. Danger besets her; she has no friend. To her alone can amends be made; to her only is reparation possible. Darrington in name, are you all dastards still in nature? I have sung the lament of the house I have served for five and eighty years; I plead for its last blossom, the ewe lamb beset by wolves. I am old, I am feeble—" He staggered as he made a step farther toward Alain, who stood spellbound. "I can not save her. There is none to save her, and I, I who alone can see her plight, I can but die." The old man drew himself up to his full height; tall and straight as a wand, thin almost to transparency, his white hair flowing on his shoulders, he looked like the spirit for which Alain had mistaken him.

"I will save my cousin, Matthew!" cried the young man. "I swear to you I will be Darrington in more than name. I will seek for her over the earth till I find her and bring her back to her own."

The old man raised his eyes to heaven, his lips moved as if he were uttering his *Nunc Dimittis*, then without a sound his slender form collapsed, and he fell at full length dead at Alain's feet. The lament of the house he had served had been his swan song, the prophecy of its sorrows and extinction the last flicker of his waning life.

Profoundly moved by the scene, Alain knelt at the dead minstrel's side till he had satisfied himself that life had really fled; then he rose and hastily retraced his steps to the castle to send servants to bear Matthew's body to the chapel. He wished to seek his mother and brother, to announce to them the determination taken so suddenly, and on what might be termed such insufficient ground, but which had already assumed, to his mind, the proportion of a settled and well-formulated purpose familiar to his thoughts for years. Striding into the hall where three of his brother's men were in consultation with Sir Guy, and his mother's favorite companion was bearing her company, the lad stood for a moment, drawn up to the utmost height of his remarkably tall figure, looking more than usually attenuated and boyish in the uncertain light of the flickering fire.

The excitement of the past hour shone in his eyes, trembled in his voice; before he had spoken Lady Margaret caught the alarm and flew to her elder son, certain that the younger had evil tidings to communicate.

"Matthew has but just fallen dead before me in the haunted garden," Alain began, without preliminary. "I thought he was the specter as he came upon me, all white, and his white hair I took for the murdered lady's veil. Before he died he sang to me a lament for the house of Darrington. The lament contained a

prophecy; more, when he finished it he spoke a prophecy. Lord Darrington is to die before a second day has passed; our little cousin, his son, as I understand it, is to die with him. Lady Isabel alone is left, and she is in great danger. Matthew cried out for a true Darrington to rescue her. I swore to him just before he died that I would be that Darrington, and with your permission, my mother, I will set out on the morrow, questing for my cousin, Lady Isabel, until I find her."

"You are too young and frail, Alain, for such an undertaking, though it is altogether a knightly one, worthy a Galahad or Launcelot," said Sir Guy, looking with new admiration and affection at the youth he had been inclined to consider somewhat too much a dreamer. "It would be wiser to entrust the task to other, more experienced hands."

"If such hands there were, Guy," suggested Alain. "Your place is here. If the dying utterance of the old man be true, and I have rightly interpreted it, you are the male heir of Darrington, succeeding by right to that which we would never accept on other terms. You can not leave the castle without a head, our mother without a protector. Yet it is the duty of one of us to go to seek Isabel on the double claim of her nearest kindred, and, and—" He broke off abruptly, unwilling to put into words the further reason for the obligation.

Lady Margaret drew up her tall form, pushing her son from her unconsciously as she did so, and throwing back her head with a proud, bold movement worthy the only survivor of a family noted for its warriors. "Alain is right, Guy," she cried. "He shall go. It is for us to set straight the cruel mistakes of the past months. He is my younger son, but I bid him Godspeed, for



“‘ Farewell, my dear, my dearest son,’ she murmured.”

something tells me that he will succeed, and that Almighty God will supplement his weakness, and protect him on a course undertaken from such noble motives, with such a just end in view. Alain, you have my permission, and though it will cost me something to send you away from me, and the hours will be long until your return, yet go you shall, and I will buckle on your armor with my blessing." And having spoken like a warrior Lady Margaret crossed over, threw herself on her boy's shoulder, and cried like a woman.

The night was spent in preparation for Alain's departure. When he was quite ready Lady Margaret brought to him a strip of blue velvet embroidered with pearls which had once been a part of a sleeve worn by Isabel; she had found it in the apartment occupied by the poor child, and had cut it out and brought it to her son.

"Let me fasten this in your helmet, my boy," said Lady Margaret, lifting his casque as she spoke, and weaving the pretty fabric securely in and out of its carvings. "You are going to rescue a fair lady in distress, like a knight of the Round Table; then, like a true knight, you should wear her colors. When you find your cousin—for find her we are both certain that you will—she will recognize her sleeve and trust you. Tell her then that your mother put it in its place, and that she is ready to love her and welcome her to Darrington as her kinswoman, and as a woman who is not herself unacquainted with sorrow."

Alain kissed his mother without a word; he alone of her children had fully understood the disappointments and trials of Lady Margaret's life.

It was just before Alain was about to depart for London, the

point toward which he should first travel with all speed, that an old servant of the former lord entered and begged to speak with him.

“Sir Guy, my lord—begging your pardon—we none of us dared tell ye, and in the confusion of your coming to Darrington you did not notice who was here the first day, and if one was missing on the third. But now Lord Alain is going to befriend our sweet little lady if she needs it, and you want to see wrongs righted for all my dear lord’s family, I’ll make bold to let you know that Jude, the jester, has been gone from the castle ever since the second sunsetting after your coming.”

“The jester? My faith, but that is true! I never missed him! Where has he gone, and why?” cried Sir Guy.

“To London, sir, my lord!” replied the servant, pulling his forelock. “When you came, and your father—rest his soul!—was in my lord’s place, Jude went half crazy with grief. And he slipped away with none but us missing him, and we don’t know whether he found my lord or whether the wild beasts and crueler men between here and London have torn him limb from limb.”

“A faithful fool; God grant he is safe and with those he loves,” said Sir Guy. “It would have been wiser to have told me his desires, and I would have furthered them. When you come to London, Alain, if you find the worst fears realized, remember Jude, and secure his passage back to us, assuring him of our protection and appreciation.”

“He shall not want for anything I can give him,” cried Alain. “And now good-by, my brother; have the Mass said in the chapel every day for the success of my attempt, and Heaven protect you all here.”

“Good-by; God speed you, Alain,” said Sir Guy. “I never loved nor respected you as I do to-day. Do your best for our cousins, but never forget how dear you are to us, and take care of your own safety, for our mother’s sake if not for mine.”

Alain turned to his mother, and, kneeling, buried his face like a child on her breast. Lady Margaret took his head in her hands, laying her lips tenderly on his shining hair. “Farewell, my dear—my dearest boy,” she murmured. “May the archangel Raphael guide you and the strength of the Most High encompass you. Keep your soul stainless and your heart true; thus shall you succeed and come back to us soon. Oh, come back to us soon, my child, my darling!”

And thus Alain set forth, like a knight of old, to seek Isabel.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE TOWER.

THE soldiers who had captured Lord Darrington had pushed their way with all possible speed to London, and delivered their prisoner to the warders of the Tower according to their instructions. The men who had accompanied the unfortunate lord had been dismissed with a warning never again to be found in the service of a traitor. But the boy, Stephen, was confined in the narrow chamber with his father, and anxiety for him made Lord Darrington's lot far more unendurable than his own hardships and dangers.

There was one consolation left him, however: Isabel had escaped. Whatever might befall himself, and even the child, whose only wrong had been in being the son of a man unjustly accused, Lord Darrington thanked Heaven every hour that the delicate young girl was beyond the reach of his enemies; he knew that both Dame Winifred and Hugo would die a thousand deaths for her sake, and under their protection he felt certain she would be safely conveyed to France and delivered into the custody of her aunt, the abbess. It was not long that this consoling thought was left him.

When Isabel had been hurried—"forced" would be the more correct word—into the boat, and Hugo had softly pushed down the stream by paddling among the rushes without oars, until they had

lain hidden under overhanging willows, nestled between the long reeds, she had been too dazed by her sudden arousing from sleep and the terror of the surprise to resist. But when she realized that her father and brother were in danger, while she was safe, she struggled so desperately to leap from the boat and make her way back to them that she could be restrained but by force.

When she was quiet enough to listen to reason, Dame Winifred, stroking her hair and soothing her with the pet names of her childhood, made her see that, so far from serving her father by her rashness, she would add immeasurably to his burdens, and that, aside from the duty of obeying his distinct commands, it was the part of love and wisdom to secure her own safety in the hope of serving him. So, when hours had passed, and Hugo knew that the soldiers must be well on their way to the destination of his beloved master, he pushed out into the stream, and raising the little sail with which the boat was provided, steered their course toward the abbey where he hoped to find shelter, and possibly help toward the end he had in view—the conveyance of his sacred charge to France.

They reached the abbey two hours after sunset. A young moon hung low in the west, the air was soft, the silence of the fields unbroken save by the hum of night insects and the lapping of the waves made by the light breeze as the little boat gently spread them under her bow.

Finding Isabel so resigned, and apparently docile at last to be guided by her father's desires and those to whom he had entrusted her, Dame Winifred and Hugo discussed at length the plans for her removal to France. At first Isabel had hoped that her father might have some chance of escaping the Tower, but learning that

there was not even the most slender hope of this she lay back silently on the cloak provided to support her, rolled up as a substitute for a pillow, and her pale face expressed no disagreement with the views of her protectors.

So difficult is it to fathom the depths of the human mind, though it be one the development of which has been watched from the first dawn of intelligence, that even Dame Winifred, who had loved the girl and tended her like a mother from her birth, utterly misunderstood the nature of the thoughts passing through the quiet head lying so still on the heavy cloak, the intention of the stout heart in the girlish body.

Never for a moment did Isabel entertain the project of allowing herself to be conveyed into safety while Lord Darrington and Stephen were in danger, but, like a wise little general, she masked her batteries until the hour of attack.

The monks were passing into the chapel for compline as the three wanderers rang the bell of the outer gate. The Brother porter admitted them, and, on being told that they were outcasts who begged a refuge for the night and possible assistance from the Father Abbot in their undeserved misfortunes, rang an inner bell, in response to which another Brother appeared, and led them to the large room used for the reception of travelers. The strain Isabel had been enduring, increased rather than lessened by the self-control she had imposed upon herself throughout the day, made her sink, half fainting, on the bench beside the fire made necessary even in summer by the chill of the vast, vaulted stone-walled room. But when she had partaken of the supper offered her by their host, and drank the cordial the kind monk put to her white lips, she was sufficiently restored to bear her part in the

discussion which she knew must take place on the appearance of the abbot.

Already the story of Lord Darrington's wrongs was known at the abbey, and when the superior came, and learned that it was the young daughter of the generous friend of his Order who claimed his help, he was ready to do all in his power to further her passage



"He found King Hal seated at the end of a small table idly pulling the ears of a greyhound, whose long head lay stretched out on his royal master's lap."

into France when told that that was the favor the travelers had come to beg.

"Listen, reverend Father, and you, Dame Winifred, and Hugo," said the girl, rising to her feet with a gentle yet firm dignity which made her foster-mother stare at the child so suddenly turned a woman. "I will not go to France. Rather than seek safety while the two to whom I owe my whole duty are in danger of

death I would walk barefoot over red-hot coals to get to London. If you love me, dear friends—if you pity me, reverend Father—you will help me toward my end. If you will not help me, but still insist on forcing me into a course for which I should forever hate and despise myself, I will find a means to escape you, and make my way, alone and unprotected, to London. But you will not be so cruel. Father, you teach us to honor our parents; surely you will not counsel me to desert my good and kind father when he is in danger—of death!”

Her voice broke on the last two words, but she quickly continued in her first steady manner of speaking.

“You, Hugo, are a soldier; I am the daughter of a warrior line, the line you and your fathers followed, and whose honor was your pride. Would you have me turn coward, be false, disloyal, selfish, unworthy my name and traditions? And, O dear foster-mother, remember Stephen! Shall I leave my little brother un-comforted in that dreary prison while I seek safety, sunshine, love in France? Do you think I would dare meet our mother on the judgment-day if I did this? If you love me, Hugo, Dame Winifred, help me do my duty, and save me from a course which would make my life one long self-reproach. It was natural and right for my father to try to protect me; it is no less natural and right for me to share his fate. Say no more of France, but bend all your energy to furthering my journey to London. If you will not help me, then, still more friendless and alone than now, I will go there without you, and in spite of you.”

Hugo and Dame Winifred looked with wonder at the resolute face, grown older by ten years in the events through which the young girl had passed; listened with something like fear to the

ring of the soft voice, grown suddenly almost hard, full of determination, pride, defiance.

The abbot struck the stone floor with his staff. "The child is right," he said. "Do not let your love for her blind your eyes to her duty, even to her best interest, since, as she says, her life would be wretched if she failed her father in his hour of trial. I do not believe there will be danger to her personally, not greater danger, at the most, than that the king might insist on marrying her to a tried Lancasterian noble. But if there were danger she is right in wishing to risk it; I honor her for her determination, and I counsel you to take her to London with your best speed, and I will see that the means to make the journey a rapid one are provided you."

As the monk spoke Isabel listened, at first with a look of relief, then with childish joy and gratitude. Throwing off the womanhood which she had assumed like an armor to combat for her desire, she ran to the old man's feet and knelt at them, kissing his ring and leaving her tears on his hand. "Dear, kind, good Father," she said, "if you were sending me to death I should bless you for not sending me into exile from those who are dearer to me than life."

Hugo turned away with something very like a sob. "So be it," he said. "You shall have your will, my little lady." But Dame Winifred ran to her, gathered her up in her arms, sobbing out: "Ah, my dove, my nursling, my lamb, you shall go to your father, and your old Winifred will die for you e'er she lets any harm touch you!"

"And now to sleep," said the abbot, gently. "Lady Isabel is forespent, and in sore need of rest. In the morning at dawn you

shall all be on your way to London, the prayers of our community and the blessing of heaven for a good daughter following you."

The kind monk fulfilled his promise. When the sun had arisen, Isabel, who had wakened before the first bird had stirred, and risen from her couch of skins spread before the fire, was so far on her road that already the gray towers of the monastery were growing small in the distance, and by the setting of the sun on the fourth day she was in her father's arms, with Stephen clasping her skirts, within the dark walls of the Tower of London.

The town was astir with the preparations for the approaching campaign in France and the departure of the king. Hence it was that the trial of Lord Darrington was not delayed, nor he left to languish in uncertainty, like so many victims of plots and injustice in that curious age. Better for him had it been so, for if time could have been won for him, the honest young cousin, Sir Guy, who had so speedily succeeded his father in the usurped estates in the north, would have set him right in the eyes of the king.

But King Hal was of a disposition disinclined to delay; the documents of the case were in his hands; the witnesses, which he never for a moment suspected of being false ones, were ready; this piece of business, he reasoned, might as well, and better, be disposed of before he set forth across the channel; he would leave one traitor less in his kingdom, one less expense to the state in the maintenance of these prisoners in the Tower. So the trial of Lord Darrington was expedited, and before his friends, the Benedictines, or those in the north who knew him to be true, could set in motion the plans for freeing him, he had been tried, convicted of treason, and sentenced to die on the block, his head to

be set upon the Temple gate, a warning to others of the danger of infidelity to the king.

The sentence was not a surprise to Lord Darrington. From the first there was no hope of other except through delay. It was to be executed at once, and the one thought of the earl was the fate of his children. Isabel and Stephen were confined, with their father, in the Tower; there was no chance of conveying them now to their friends. They were wholly at the mercy of the king, and what that mercy might mean who could say?

It was Hugo who resolved to venture into the royal presence and learn what it meant; bluff, humbly born, uncourtly as he was, he determined to appeal to the young king, who was also bluff and soldierly, to spare the children so soon to be orphaned by his decree. Without saying a word of this visionary plan to Lord Darrington, Hugo, who was allowed to go back and forth between the outer world and his master, started for the palace.

"Tell the king it is an old soldier who would speak with him, not for himself, but for children whom he loves," said Hugo at the gates, and the message was carried to King Henry. The boldness, the utter ignorance of custom implied by this request, amused the young monarch, who loved not ceremony and valued soldiers at their highest; he was in a sunny mood that day, and somewhat tired of the dulness of his surroundings.

"Bid the old soldier enter," he said, laughing. "I wonder if he will leave his children to go to France with us; by the rood, we need all brave men, to show France our colder England is rugged in sons as in clime."

Hugo, unabashed, nor surprised at the success of his demand, stalked after his conductor into the royal presence. He found

King Hal seated at the end of a small table idly pulling the ears of a greyhound, whose long head lay stretched out on his royal master's lap; two of the court sat at the side of the table, the elder of whom looked up scowling as Hugo entered. But the king gave him a merry glance as he strode to the other side of the table, rested his hand on it lightly, and looked long and earnestly at the king, for supposed treason to whom his beloved master was to die in three days' time.

"Ah, the old soldier!" said the king, pleasantly. "What ails your children, man? We are not conning nursery songs, but battle hymns, just now. However, speak out fearlessly, for we love your daring, and will do for you anything within reason."

"I thank Your Majesty for that promise, for I have but a reasonable request to make," said Hugo. "I am no maker of phrases, Your Majesty, but one who can handle an arquebus better than words. I am a loyal man to Your Majesty, heart and core, but no less to the dear master I have served all my life, and whose fathers my fathers have followed since either are recorded. I have come to beg Your Majesty to give me leave to take his boy and girl into safety when he is dead. Sure, it is within the reason in which Your Majesty promises me my desires that I should be allowed to protect them for whom I would suffer all the tortures of this world and the next. Sure, it is within reason that the young and innocent should be spared and protected when their father dies—innocently, Your Majesty. I call God to witness that my lord has never harbored a disloyal thought, but will die unjustly, and I know whereof I speak."

"You speak volubly for one who can not use words as well as arms," said the king, sitting erect in his chair. "We are not able

to follow your argument, being unenlightened as to its theme. For whom are you pleading, what children do you wish to protect, and who is it who you are bold enough to tell your king is to die unjustly?"

"Lord Darrington, Your Majesty," began Hugo.

King Henry stopped him with an imperious gesture.

"Fellow," he said, "I like fidelity, a quality too rare in the followers of kings, but you are presuming on my patience when you dare to venture here to beard me with protestations of your master's loyalty. He hath been tried and found guilty of treason by the courts of this realm. But we will overlook your impertinence, making allowance for the faith you evidently feel in your master's innocence. Say no more or it will go hard with you. Now for the other point—the children. The girl, as I am told, is somewhat past the age at which she can longer be described as a child. Her future is provided for; if it were not you would hardly be a suitable guardian for a young lady delicate and highly born. To relieve your anxiety, and even that of her guilty father, whose death we would not render more bitter by cares of his children, you may know that she will be given in marriage to a lord whose loyalty to us and the house of Lancaster will counteract any treasonable blood she may transmit to their children. The boy will be confided to a guardian who will deal with him wisely. You have my royal word that no harm will befall the offspring of the former lord of Darrington when he is dead. Now, no more. When you go back to your master tell him that few monarchs would have been so considerate of him and his, so patient with your impertinence, as he against whom Lord Darrington conspired. Go!"

"But, Your Majesty—" began Hugo.

"Silence, sirrah!" cried the king, stamping his foot. "By Heaven, am I a king or am I not? Lead this man to the gates!" he added, turning to an arras hanging behind him, through which, at the summons, appeared six men-at-arms. "Go, and that instantly! And remember you have had great kindness shown you at the hands of your king."

There was no choice but to obey, and Hugo, sore-hearted and downcast by the failure of his mission, returned to the Tower.

That night the father so soon to die and his children sat in silence as the darkness crept around them, and Hugo and Dame Winifred whispered softly in a corner of fruitless schemes for Isabel and Stephen's rescue. The door was opened by the jailer and some one thrust within the room. It closed again, and Lord Darrington asked: "Who is it enters this place of sorrow and despair?"

"O master, master, don't you know me?" cried a voice choked with sobs, and Jude, the jester, stumbled forward, clasping Lord Darrington's feet, mumbling them, and kissing his hand in passionate grief, and yet joy, at seeing once more his dear old protector.

"Jude, in heaven's name how came you here?" cried Lord Darrington, raising him.

"I ran away; I could not live longer without you," said the jester.

"Tell me all that has happened at Darrington since our flight," said Lord Darrington.

Jude seated himself on the floor to comply, and for an hour the little group in the Tower listened to his story. When he had finished Lord Darrington told his faithful fool the history of his



"Isabel threw herself on his shoulder, her arms encircling his neck."

escape, capture, trial, and condemnation. "I am willing to die," he said, as he ended. "What matters it a little sooner or later, since the end is always to die? But I must leave Isabel to be bestowed on some one of whose character—name even—I am ignorant, and my little son to the training of one equally unknown. If there were any means by which they could be conveyed to my friends I should die content."

"Master," said Jude, "since you have been speaking your fool has been thinking. Let the Lady Isabel put on Dame Winifred's garments and lead me to the prison gates; the waiting-woman hath egress?"

"Yes!" said Hugo, breathlessly.

"My doublet is wide and my cloak is ample," continued Jude. "I will carry my little lord in my arms, the doublet buttoned over his slender body. Over it all I will wrap my cloak, and I will walk as bent with grief—God knows there will need be no deceit in that—and the supposed Dame Winifred shall lead me, as I gibber and moan. And Lady Isabel shall tell the guards that my lord's poor jester hath gone stark mad with grief, and she begs them allow her lead him to an inn near by, since Hugo is needed by her lord and the jester will not follow a stranger. And they, not knowing she is not Dame Winifred, may let her pass. Once outside in the friendly night, we will flee for our lives, and make our way to the nearest Benedictine abbey, where Father Jerome's friends will help us. Is it not a good plan, and will you not consent to it, dear master?"

"A mad plan, but yet it might—there is no other chance, however slender," murmured Lord Darrington. Turning to Isabel, he said: "You will carry it out, my daughter. Desperate men

can not be nice as to means. God's mercy may make the impossible happen."

"Not now!" cried Isabel. "It would be farewell—" She could not go on.

"Forever, dear? Yes;" said her father. "But there is only one day more. It rests with you to make it less bitter. Act as becomes a daughter of a brave race. The future of that race, Stephen, its heir, is in your hands. Say good-by to the old lord from whom you must part in any case. For his sake save the young lord, save your brother. If you love me, Isabel, go with Jude; go now."

The young girl fell on her knees, and knelt motionless as the moments fled; no one uttered a word. At last she rose. "I will do my best," she said, simply.

"My brave girl!" said her father. "Quick, Winifred; arrange her garments."

The sobbing woman dressed her young mistress in her own outer skirt, veil, and jacket. It took scarce ten minutes.

"You and Hugo will join the children on the second day," said Lord Darrington. He held out his arms. Isabel threw herself on his shoulder, her arms encircling his neck. Stephen nestled against his father's side, clasped tight by his right arm. Jude, on the floor in front of them; Hugo, standing with bent head behind the little group, and Dame Winifred, from the corner where she hid her face, sobbed aloud.

"Now, Jude, good friend, take the boy," said Lord Darrington, straightening himself, and gently pushing Stephen toward the jester. Jude arose, lifted Stephen, buttoned his loose upper garment around the boy, and wrapped his cloak over them both.

“That is well. Be brave, wise, silent, Stephen. Remember you are Lord Darrington, and on you hangs the future of our race. Come, my daughter,” he added. “Act well your part. There is but one thought: save Stephen! Take Jude’s hand as if you were leading him. You are making me happy, dear; don’t forget that.”

Isabel drew up her figure, and set her lips. Her eyes were tearless, but she looked like one death-stricken. Without a word she withdrew her arms from her father’s neck, took Jude’s hand, and looked to Hugo to summon the guard to open the door. Hugo knocked, the jailer answered. “My lord needs me,” said Hugo, “for certain last arrangements—instructions he wishes to give me. This poor jester has gone mad with grief in parting; you did wrong to admit him here. Please allow the waiting-woman to conduct him to an inn. Here is a gold piece.”

“Come with me,” said the jailer. “You do well to reproach me for kindness in letting in an old follower of your master,” he added, surlily.

“True, friend, it sounded ungrateful, and you meant it well. But it is hard to see the poor fool’s slender wit gone entirely. Take him out, and kindly tell your men to admit Dame Winifred at once on her return, for the poor young Lady Isabel needs her.”

No more was said. Jude, bending under his burden, walked slowly, moaning, gibbering, making wild cries that caused the men on guard to withdraw from him as he passed. And, holding tight his hand, without a backward look, Isabel passed forever out of the presence of her father. Lord Darrington watched them with dry, straining eyes. When the door swung behind them, and the heavy bolt once more slipped into place, he fell at full length in a dead faint on the prison floor.

CHAPTER VIII.

TIDINGS FROM ACROSS THE CHANNEL.

WHEN Alain set forth from Darrington on his adventures as knight-errant no tidings of the events occurring in London had reached the castle. Hoping to arrive at that city in time to gain the king's ear, and save Lord Darrington from the scaffold by the humiliating tale he was prepared to tell, he pressed on eagerly. But many weeks had passed since the day when the herald announcing the misfortunes which had fallen on both branches of the house of Darrington had ridden to the castle, even since the Warwickshire baronet's family had taken possession of it, and it was August when Alain rode into the capital. His prompt inquiries for news of the affairs of his cousins were met with the information that he had come too late. Lord Darrington was dead; the king, with his army, had set sail for France; no one could tell him of the fate of Isabel and Stephen. With bitter disappointment and grief in his heart Alain paid his reckoning at the inn where these unwelcome tidings were given him and walked forth in the warm August sunset toward the Temple. There, beneath the Bar, he paused, looking upward. Affixed to a pole, with tight-sealed eyelids resting on the pallid cheeks, which were ghastly in the glowing light reflected from the adjoining walls, hung a head where so many of the noblest in England were yet to hang, the guilty as well as they who were martyrs to their convictions. Alain gazed at this head,

knowing it for that of the cousin whom in life he had never seen. Horror-stricken as he had been in his distant home when the knowledge of his father's villainy had been forced upon him, the full realization of its extent crushed him fully as he stood looking upward at the man whom Sir Gaspar had despoiled, murdered. For what was this infamous death but a most cruel and triply



"The countryman rested on the handle of his rude plow, one hand thrust into his leathern breeches pocket, and eyed Roger suspiciously some minutes before answering his question."

criminal murder? It seemed to Alain that the pale lips moved; he bared his head to the ghastly head above him.

"Pray God for me, and for my mother and brother, that He will not hold us guilty of his sin," he whispered. "Help me find thy orphaned children, and may my death be ten thousand times more bitter than thine if I deal not with them according to my vow. Amen."

Sick at heart he turned away, impatient to devise the next move in the mysterious tangle of events to which he had no clew.

The companion of Alain's quest was a man of something more than middle age, who had come to Warwickshire with Lady Margaret on her marriage to Sir Gaspar; he had been, as was Hugo to the elder branch of the Darringtons, a follower, both in his own person and that of his forebears, of Lady Margaret's family, and for her, or for her sons, he would not have considered the value of his life an instant if the laying of it down could have served them.

This man, Roger Ash, was awaiting his young master at the sign of the Three Archers, and to that inn Alain bent his steps.

"What shall be our first move, Roger?" he asked. "There is nothing to indicate which is the best course to pursue in striving to discover my cousins. Have you any suggestion to make?"

"Only that it seems to me that if the young lord and lady were not alive we should have heard of it, and, being alive, they would likely be found in France, where, as I have heard, their mother had relatives. If not there, then I should search for them in the religious houses of England, and of these first among the Benedictines, because Father Jerome was high in that Order and a good friend of the late lord," replied Roger.

"Those are good suggestions, old friend, and my thoughts were much of the same order," said Alain. "What say you to taking the latter clew first, since we are in England? Further, it seems unlikely that these unprotected creatures would voluntarily enter France now, when the king has just invaded it for war. To-morrow, then, early, we will leave London for St. Benedict's. Stay! Is it not possible that the king hath disposed of my cousins, and that neither of our moves will be the right one?"

“It is quite possible,” said Roger, dryly. “But what is the use of considering first that which would be the most difficult circumstance to deal with? If they are in the king’s hands, at least they are safe, for King Hal hath a generous heart and a warm one, and will not allow a young girl and helpless child to suffer. Let us assume that they escaped when their father was imprisoned; a likely supposition, since there is no trace of their attendants, nor of that jester who left the castle after our coming. If that is the case, they are in sore need of help; if they are in the hands of the king, they are safe from actual ill. So let us search for them first; failing to find them, let us follow His Majesty. You will go to him, lay your story before him, and he will at once place your cousins in your hands and restore the boy to his estates and title. It would not be King Henry if he did not do all in his power to make amends for an injustice wrought through him, though not his responsibility.”

“You speak wisely, Roger, and I will be guided by you. Let us sup, and then to sleep, that we may be refreshed for an early start to the monastery.”

St. Benedict’s, to which Alain and Roger first turned their steps in the search begun at the dawn of the following day for the fugitives, was a rich abbey, standing alone among its rolling green fields, two-thirds of a days’ ride from London. Its glebes were rented to a thrifty tenantry, who derived benefit from small rents, as the monks did from their occupation of the land. The monastery was a refuge for the unfortunate, a sanctuary even for the guilty, and its proximity to the capital made it taxed more heavily than most of its sister foundations to serve this latter class of unhappy beings.

When Alain and Roger rode into the main avenue, passing through its beautiful farms, the peasants were working the fields, garnering their abundant August crops, for the rich land, irrigated by the Thames, was fertile beyond most glebe acres.

Roger dismounted, and, giving his bridle into Alain's hand, leaped the low wall between the road and the laborers, and approached a sturdy farmer who was plowing in the hillocks from which the potatoes had been gathered, preparing the ground for its second sowing of wheat.

"My friend," said Roger, coming up to him, "we are travelers who are seeking a young lady and a lad who are of noble blood, and who have been most cruelly wronged. We have it in our power to right their wrongs, and it is for this purpose we seek them. We believe they, or one of them, may have taken refuge in the monastery, coming here within the past month from London, where their father, Lord Darrington, has died on the block for a crime he never committed. Time presses; if you have seen or heard aught of such wanderers, tell us and save us the delay of going to the monastery in case they have been here and have gone on farther. Do you know anything of them we seek?"

The countryman rested on the handle of his rude plow, one hand thrust into his leathern breeches' pocket, and eyed Roger suspiciously some minutes before answering his question. Then he said, stolidly: "It baint for me to tell what I knows nor what I don't know. The faithers younder'll tell all 'ts good for ye; goo on t' munast'ry."

"Waste no time on questions here, Roger," called Alain, from the saddle. "We must press on to the monastery."

"Ah, goo on t' munast'ry; if t' lass ye seek were here a fort-

night ago I'd not tell ye," said the bumpkin, grinning at Roger's back as he returned to Alain.

"It sounds rather like a hint, none the less," said Roger, laughing, as he remounted his horse.

The travelers were conducted at once to the abbot, to whom they told their errand.

"I beg you, reverend Father," added Alain, as he ended, "if you know anything of my cousins, tell me where I may seek them, and, finding them, bring them back to their own, and to the loving care of my mother until they no longer need it."

"My son," said the abbot, kindly, "I could put you in the way of finding Lady Isabel, but you will not condemn me if I am cautious. The intention you announce of restoring to these victims of injustice their rank and estate is so far out of the usual that I may be pardoned for wishing assurance that it is sincere, especially—you will not be offended at the frankness due you—from your father's son. I am not even certain, you must bear in mind, that you are the person you claim to be. Human nature is more inclined to keep that it holds, however come by, than to voluntary restitution. I will lose no time in investigating your story; if it is true, as, in spite of a long experience of the cruelty men are capable of, I am inclined to believe it is, you shall learn all I know of your cousin. In the mean time, it can do no harm for me to tell you that Lady Isabel, her brother, their male and female attendant, and Lord Darrington's jester escaped from London and slipped through the king's fingers. Lord Stephen, with Jude, the fool, took a different route to their common meeting-place from that chosen by Hugo for Lady Isabel and her woman. Highway-men fell upon the unprotected boy, and both he and Jude were

murdered; their bodies were found not far from here, and were brought to us for burial. You shall be shown the spot, if you desire, for it marks the end of the elder male line of Darringtons."

Alain dropped his face into his hands, and remained silent for a time. When he raised his eyes to the abbot's they were full of pain, his cheeks were flushed, his breath came swiftly.

"Another sorrow, and this the greatest, to the younger line of Darringtons, my Father," he said. "Then my brother is Lord Guy beyond appeal?"

"Beyond appeal; the king can not alter the decrees of death," assented the abbot.

"There could be no tidings more unwelcome," said the young man. "Our restitution can be only partial. Why could not God have taken the daughter, and not the son of Lord Darrington? Can it be that we are not to be permitted to make reparation for a wrong that was never our desire? Yet Matthew prophesied the death of this boy, and made me promise to rescue the girl only."

"Matthew! Then you knew the minstrel?" exclaimed the abbot. "You are giving me proofs of your identity, and it would be hard to doubt your sincerity, seeing you now. Be comforted, my son; God will not reject your good-will. It may be in His plans that through your line the old race is to rise to greater heights. I trust you, young Alain Darrington, and I believe you to be the true bearer of that name. But it is my duty still to be cautious. One thing I will tell you: Lady Isabel, Hugo, and Dame Winifred are not in England. Go you also to Havre, and wait there till you receive a message from me. I will assure myself of your identity and truth, and I will then send you complete directions how to find Lady Isabel; this shall be done so quickly that even



"Stopping short, and looking around, he saw a pale, dark face smiling at him."

youthful impatience will not have reason to complain. Brother, take these strangers to the tomb wherein we have laid the young Lord Darrington and his jester, and then give them the refreshment and comfortable bed their weariness craves. When you have slept, and are ready to resume your journey, pass on to France, and in Havre you shall hear from me if you are in every way what you claim to be. If you are not, return to your northern castle, for Lady Isabel is safe, and you will wait forever before you learn from me a hint that will enable you to discover her."

"I shall wait your message at Havre, reverend Father," said Alain, simply. "I am Alain Darrington, desiring nothing so much as to give back to my cousin all the property which is not entailed to the male line, a desire shared no less by my brother and mother."

Alain and Roger knelt long at the tomb where lay the faithful heart that had beaten under the motley garb of a jester, the little form that had enclosed the hope of the elder branch of his race. This, then, was the end; Stephen was dead, and Guy reigned by right in his place, but if the dreadful day had never dawned which drove the boy from Darrington would he not have been still alive, growing within its walls to succeed his father as its lord? Alain shuddered to think that this death, too, lay at their doors. He prayed earnestly to the innocent child, so cruelly murdered, to avert the sins of the father from the sons of guilty Sir Gaspar, to plead for them that they might find Isabel, and do the little left them to do to make atonement.

On the next day Alain and Roger set sail for France, to wait in Havre the messenger of the abbot. They found the city under martial law. King Henry had but recently quitted it for Harfleur,

and the air was full of excitement. Like any youth of his years and time, Alain longed to hasten after the king to see the capture of Harfleur, but his mission was more sacred, its pleading more powerful than the call to arms.

He waited with what patience he could summon till he was free to depart. The days seemed endless, but they slipped by one by one. At last there came one at the close of which Roger was returning alone from a stroll around the walls of the town to join his young master at the inn. As he strode along, bareheaded, his stout staff in his hand, he felt a touch upon his shoulder. Stopping short, and looking around, he saw a pale, dark face smiling at him, the face of a student; its owner wore a simple tunic, and carried no arms save a short knife thrust in his belt.

"The follower of Alain Darrington, if I mistake not?" said the stranger.

"I am," replied Roger.

"The abbot of St. Benedict's sends his blessing to your young master, and bids me say he is certain his efforts will not be in vain. She you seek has gone to her aunt, the abbess of St. Catherine's, thirty miles beyond Rouen. But since the invasion of King Henry will make Englishmen's journeys through this land hard, if not impossible, the abbot recommends you to join the king, tell him your story, and get his help toward carrying out your plan. Lady Isabel is accompanied by her man, Hugo, and her woman. More there is not to tell you."

"Thank you, friend; it is quite enough!" cried Roger, gaily. "My master has been eating his heart out in this inaction; we will follow the army to Harfleur at dawn. Bid the abbot and his monks pray for us. Farewell!"

CHAPTER IX.

GALLANT HARRY, THE KING.

ALAIN sprang to horse, rejoicing to be free to follow his longing and his king to the scene of action. Not only was he glad of the first definite tidings of Isabel, but it had been testing his self-control to the utmost to stay dutifully in Havre. The assault of Harfleur was going on so near that, had he not been afraid of missing the exact hour of the arrival of the abbot's messenger, he could have ridden over, fired a few fleet arrows, and returned to Havre in ample time for his coming. So when the report brought him by Roger set him free, he darted up like one of those arrows from its bow and covered the short distance between the towns without loss of a moment.

A small fortification on the outskirts of Harfleur, on the side next Havre, had been taken, and was occupied by the English. Alain and Roger rode up to it, were challenged by the officer in command of the little band holding it, but were admitted on declaring their names, and that their purpose was to join the king.

Alain rode up to the walls, and, shading his eyes with his hand, scanned the action raging before Harfleur. The assault was even then drawing to its close. A breach had been made in the walls, through which the English were swarming like ants, plumes of officers waving over the bare heads of the bowmen; arquebusiers planting their heavy weapons higher on the ascent, and everywhere

armor glittering so dazzlingly in the August sunshine that Alain could not distinguish plan nor movement in the confused mass of brilliant steel and gay quarterings.

“Follow me, Roger!” he cried, all the young blood in his veins leaping at the sight of the first battle his eyes had ever rested on. “We are not too late for the end, and to strike one blow for the capture of Harfleur.”

Without a moment's delay, striking spurs into their horses, Alain and Roger shot through the gateway of the fortification, and dashed into the *melée*, hoping for an opportunity to take part in this final act of the second event in this French campaign. The king dashed hither and yon, issuing orders, encouraging his men, fearless, as if his life were charmed or arrows harmless. Alain guided his horse toward the gallant figure which he had never before seen, but toward which he looked with the admiring curiosity felt for the young king by all his subjects. Brave, generous, honest; in friendship faithful, yet no less implacable to an enemy, King Harry had endeared himself to England by those qualities most highly prized by his race. In spite of the wildness of his youth he was making a monarch soberly conscious of his responsibilities, and was leading England into glory, albeit there were many who doubted his right to claim the French crown for which he was then in battle. Alain, accustomed to think, and not to drift on the wave of popular enthusiasm, was one of those who thus questioned, but the sight of the daring young hero leading his countrymen to victory against an enemy who was a foe in the very grain, regardless of the cause for which the English fought him at various times, fired Alain beyond consideration of the reason for the army being there.

"God for King Harry! St. George for England!" he heard the king shout, and joined in the cry as madly as any of the soldiers.

As he dashed up to the king, Alain chanced to look toward the city wall. There, on a buttress, stood an archer; Alain saw him step forth from among his fellows, raise his bow, and aim deliberately at the open visor of the English monarch, thrown back to



"Alain rode up to the walls, and, shading his eyes with his hand, scanned the action raging before Harfleur. The assault was even then drawing to its close."

admit the air, for the August heat made closed helmets hard to stand.

"St. George! England!" cried Alain, not knowing what he uttered. At the same time he turned his horse, throwing himself directly across the king's path, and snatched his own helmet from his head, holding it before the king. The arrow pierced Isabel's embroidered bit of sleeve, and stuck there, and at the same time an

English man-at-arms, springing up the wall, struck down the archer with his mace, dealing a blow that would prevent him ever speeding another arrow from his quiver.

As soon as he recognized the safety of the king, Alain replaced his helmet, its visor down, and backed away from the royal leader. Pulling his rein, he turned his horse, and contrived to lose himself in the throng pressing every moment more closely around him.

“Who was that youth who saved my life?” demanded King Hal. “I thought I knew every knight in our army, yet him have I never seen. Find him for me. Why has he done his sovereign such service but to melt from sight? He carries no device, but in his helmet a blue velvet, pearl-embroidered strip, that looks like a part of a lady’s gown. Find him, and mark him for future gratitude.”

The rush of the assault bore the king onward, struggling to regain his lost place in the van, and his commands in regard to Alain had to wait convenient time and place for execution. That young adventurer himself, seeking a new breach farthest from the point where the king was attacking, rushed up the wall, leaving his horse with Roger while he scaled on foot. Like a portent of good still to come, as well as an unspeakable present joy, he laid to his soul the blessed thought that he, a youth untrained to battle, a stranger, without place or command in this brave army, had actually saved the life of Harry of Monmouth, England’s darling and her king.

Harfleur was carried quickly, once the breaches were made, and the lusty soldiers had effected a foothold. Sunset saw the royal banner floating over its towers, an English garrison pacing its walls, English soldiers guarding its streets. Alain had secured a

quiet lodging in a secluded corner of the town, wishing to escape the search which he conjectured would be made for the stranger who had saved the king's life. It was his plan to wait upon the king in the morning, when, if His Majesty chose to thank him, he might do so by granting the request he had to make; he felt that was not less than providential that, though he should never claim the royal gratitude, he had a lien upon it which could hardly fail to plead for him should the king be disinclined to hearken to him favorably.

Roger polished up his young master's accouterments till they shone like mirrors in the summer sunshine as he stepped forth to present himself at the door of the royal lodging. Several of the rank and file had, obediently to the king's desires, been searching in both sections of the army for the youthful hero of the day before, but Alain had been successful in concealing himself, and now, when he rode in all the glittering glory of Roger's handiwork, up to the guards stationed before the house chosen by King Henry for his temporary headquarters, the honest soldiers started back amazed, recognizing the sign by which he for whom they had sought in vain was to be recognized—the blue velvet embroidered in pearls quilted through his helmet—wondering, as men always must when that which they desire, and by great effort strive to attain, presents itself at their own door unsought.

“Good friends, will you ask the king if a stranger, but an English stranger of an old and loyal house, may speak with him?” said Alain.

“MAY speak with His Majesty?” repeated one of the soldiers, emphatically. “Nay, young sir, you **MUST** speak with him. It is His Majesty's orders that we find you, and take you to him.”

“But a part of that can you obey,” said Alain, laughing. “’Tis I have found you, but gladly will I help you carry out the latter half of His Majesty’s commands, since it is but for that, and its consequences, I have followed him to France.”

“Come with me, my lord,” said the soldier, bowing. “There is no need to ask permission, for His Majesty will reward me for bringing you.” So saying, he preceded Alain into the hall, his companion holding back the door for them to pass; it was evident that they felt the savior of the king was to be honored.

At the door of the apartment occupied by King Hal, Alain’s guide paused. A page at the inner side opened to his knock, and, leaving the door ajar, went forward to announce the visitor. There was not a moment’s delay; a ringing voice said, “Bid him enter, and welcome,” and the page returned to usher Alain into the royal presence.

There was no one with King Henry as Alain went toward him. He saw a young, strong form clad in complete armor seated at a table, the map of France spread out upon it, and the king’s forceful, keen, yet merry face bent over it, studying it intently. All this the young man saw in one swift glance.

His Majesty looked up with a pleasant smile as Alain advanced. Stretching out his hand he said: “Welcome, shyest, most modest of preservers. I began to think St. George himself must have held his helmet before me to save me for some good to England when all the messengers I sent to search for you returned saying there was no trace of you apparently in all the world—at least the world of Harfleur.”

“Your Majesty was most kind to try to discover me,” said Alain, bending to kiss the hand so frankly held out to him. “I

followed Your Majesty to France to beg a favor, and it would have been hard if I, at least, had not found you."

"And it will go hard with me to refuse you anything you ask me," returned the young king, cordially. "It is proverbial that princes are ungrateful, but my friends say Harry of Monmouth is not of that stripe. But who are you, and why is it that such a brave youth was not of our little party which came to pluck French fruits in August sunshine, a youth too unmistakably well born, and better bred?"

"That is part of the story I came to tell Your Majesty," answered Alain. "Is there time for a somewhat long tale now, or shall I wait Your Majesty's greater convenience?"

"My majesty is young and curious, and will not wait," said the king, pushing back the map.

"Be seated, friend, and pour out your soul to me, for I like you as well as I should desire to like the man to whom I owe my life. Proceed, young sir."

Alain drew up the stool the king indicated with a gesture, and seated himself at the king's right hand. "There is no one within hearing, Your Majesty?" he said. "Since events have happened as they have, and no good can be served by publishing my story, I would have it for your ears alone."

"No one will hear you," replied King Henry. "Begin; I am all attention."

"Your Majesty, I am Alain Darrington, son of Sir Gaspar Darrington, who is dead, and brother to the present lord, Guy Darrington, who has succeeded through bitter wrong and injustice to the Darrington estate and title."

"Injustice?" exclaimed the king. "Are you come to tell me

the death of that traitor was a wrong done by me; you, the son and brother of the men who profited by it?"

"Heaven help me, I am not come to tell Your Majesty that," said Alain. "Much as I love my king, and proud as I am of his honor, I would rather it were he who had unjustly sentenced my kinsman to death than that my father's treachery and falsehood should have compassed it."

"Now, God forbid you are speaking sooth!" cried King Henry. "The proofs of your cousin's treachery were piled up; there were witnesses to swear to his treason. He had trial."

"I know," said Alain, sadly, "though we did not know in time. When my father died at the hands of my cousin's champion, who came to avenge him by a mortal combat, my mother, brother, and I learned the truth for the first time. We resolved to lay it before Your Majesty, and we knew you would then reinstate my cousins; we would rather die a thousand deaths than retain a title gained through injustice—fraud is the truer word. I rode to London, but it was too late; Lord Darrington was dead, his little son was slain by highwaymen, trying to escape to relatives in this country. Your Majesty had sailed for Havre. I followed you as soon as a vessel would carry me. There remains alive but Lady Isabel, the young daughter of the late lord. She is in France; where, I do not know, but I am informed her destination is the abbey over which her aunt is Superior, near Rouen. The poor girl can not succeed to the title nor the entailed estates, but there is much which may be given over to her, and the plea I make to Your Majesty is that you will help me find her, and consent to the reparation all our family desire to make her."

The king had listened in silence to this speech, his head resting



"He saw a young, strong form clad in complete armor, sitting at a table."

on his hand. Pity for the young man before him who so keenly felt his father's crime, his own disgrace; passionate regret for a cruel injustice, against the reparation of which the grave raised an eternal barrier, and recollections of his own royal father's seizure of the crown, the injustice done by King Richard, passed swiftly through the mind of King Henry as he hearkened.

"Alain Darrington, you are a noble youth, as is your brother," he said, rising, and beginning to pace the room up and down. "I honor you both, and I am glad, since the wrong has been accomplished, that you are the ones who are to uphold your ancient name. But I would to Heaven I had delayed the trial; one short month would have been enough."

Alain bowed silently. The king groaned. "Heaven help me, and yet how was I to know? When proofs sufficient to mislead the court were laid before it, what could I do but sign the death-warrant?"

"It never has occurred to me to think Your Majesty to blame; the guilt lies on our house," said Alain, sadly.

"But not on you!" cried the king, taking both his hands. "Such reparation as you have tried to make not only exonerates you from any share in the wrong done by your father—who, we will hope, God has pardoned—but must be most meritorious in the sight of Heaven; it is not all of us who have the grace to prefer the right to our own interests. As to the poor maiden, bereft of all that made the world to her, I will not only assent to your plans for her, but will further them by every means at my command. It is not an easy nor a safe matter to reign, good Alain. When my last hour has come, shall I be able to meet the King of kings, knowing I have always striven to obey Him while demanding obedience of

others? But my counselors have decided my claim to France was just; the blood of the slain can not cry to Heaven to be avenged on my head, for that I caused it to be shed unjustly." He paused in front of Alain a moment, as if awaiting an answer.

Alain did not speak; he was frightened by the misery on the king's face, but as he looked on it, it was gone. "Come," said Henry, "it is too late to question that, and I have not acted on my own opinion. Forget that the king was unkingly, but remember he has envied you your opportunity to shake from your skirts all complicity with wrong, and do not forget that your lot is happier than his. Henceforth we are friends, Alain Darrington. You are of the royal men whose friendship may well be a king's boast. And we are bonded friends by singular pledges. You have saved my life; we both shall never cease to regret the wrong of which both have been innocently the victims, though my share of the burden is far heavier than yours. And we will be associates in seeking the only living creature to whom a slight reparation for these cruel sufferings can be made.

"Now, as to that," added King Henry, as Alain once more kissed his hand, deeply touched and wholly charmed by the frank and simple sincerity of the royal soldier, "it seems to me that in the present unsettled state of the country, and our invasion of it, it would be madness for you to attempt to traverse it alone in your search for Lady Isabel. Besides which, though you know her ultimate destination is near Rouen, you do not know where she is now, nor by what route she will travel toward it. Hence I counsel you, and invite you to stay with me. I will tell you, though it is yet a secret, that my plan is to march on Rouen as soon as possible. In the mean time we shall take Calais, where

it is highly probable Lady Isabel has landed. Remain with me, then, and we will fight our way to victory and Lady Isabel."

"Your Majesty is most kind, and I have no choice but to accept the arrangement," replied Alain.

"But not because it is 'His Majesty's arrangement,' only because you think it best, and because you prefer being with your friend, Harry of Monmouth, I hope?" said the king.

"Because I see no other plan as hopeful, and because, much as I have heard of him, I never dreamed Harry of Monmouth was so lovable, or Henry the Fifth so noble," said Alain, flushing with the enthusiasm of his years. "Now that I am graciously allowed to know and love him, it would be a hard matter if I had to leave him."

The king laughed gleefully. "That's the kind of loyalty, that's the sort of friends I want!" he cried. "Half the stories you hear of my former wildness—and I was a sad scamp, Alain—are founded on my desire to get at the real man sealed up forever from a king. I like a friend, boy, and out of all the misery of the story you have brought me shines the fact I've found a man to trust, to whom already I owe not only my life, but a refreshment of soul you, lucky youth, can't imagine. Page, bring two glasses and the wine. We'll drink to our friendship, and to our rescue of Lady Isabel."

CHAPTER X.

“THIS DAY IS CALLED THE FEAST OF CRISPIN.”

ALAIN, half reluctantly, half gladly, lingered with the army and the king. He longed to be on his own business, following the pursuit of his fugitive cousin; but, on the other hand, this gallant English king, not ten years his senior, so won his heart that he had no choice but to rejoice in his favor, his presence. Neither was it possible to be as young as Alain and not be stirred to excited interest by the military movement, the clash of arms, the plans for a great campaign in the air around him.

But there was not wholly hope and presage of success in the English camp. Sickness, death, was in the warm sunshine, and beyond the walls of Harfleur were laid daily thousands of poor fellows in the trenched graves, victims of the disease which fought for France more forcibly than archers could. Through the beautiful September weather King Henry watched his army fade away, holding his purpose unfaltering, though men were garnered by death in numbers scarcely less than the grapes gathered then in the French vineyards.

Calais was to be the next point of attack.

“We’ll march on Calais like Edward, of martial memory, good Darrington, and we shall find the French so divided against themselves under the leading of their Graces of Burgundy and Orleans, that there will be no concord among them to oppose to us in Eng-

land. You will see Calais drop like a ripe plum when I shake the tree, and a vigorous shaking will we give it," said the king.

"If I may venture, being young and inexperienced in war," said Alain, diffidently, "I would ask Your Majesty if you had considered the smallness of our force, the desperate illness of many of our poor fellows still, though the disease is now somewhat abating?"

"Not considered it, Alain, but noted it," said the king. "It is not worth considering. I believe our English valor—for I am boastful of my men and know their metal—together with the disruption of our enemies, will more than equal the ravages made by death in our army. In any case, we are going to march on Calais, and Calais, attacked, must fall, for surely one or the other, French or English, must be victors, and do you think there can be defeat waiting us?"

Alain laughed, catching the humor of the merry King Hal, and threw up his plumed cap with a shout. "So be it, and with such a leader neither sickness nor the clutch of death itself ought to chill the courage of the army."

Preparations for quitting Harfleur for the siege of Calais were not long in making. Alain was given a command, and Roger, at his young master's request, was trusted to an office in the commissary; it was Alain's thought that if evil befell him there would be Roger safe to take home to England the story of his adventures, and guide Lord Guy in carrying on the search for Isabel, a labor he knew his brother would faithfully fulfil.

At high noon one bright autumn morning the little army, sorely thinned in numbers but gay in accouterments, with pennons waving and faces shining with eagerness to be led on to a vic-

tory it never doubted under their trusted and loved royal leader, was gathered at the gates of Harfleur.

Within the public square, in the heart of the city, the king sat on his horse, and around him waited the priests who had accompanied him, two bishops, also mounted, at their head. King Henry not only believed that God's blessing called down upon the army would be fruitful, but he was wise enough to understand that the slender remnant of men he was leading to a daring attempt, weakened by illness themselves, and having seen their comrades die in great numbers, would be heartened to new confidence if a solemn benediction were given them before setting forth, a spiritual buckler when steel had been proving ineffectual. Slowly and solemnly the regents of the Church went forth upon the outer wall, preceding the king, and stood silently facing the army. Then, stepping in front of his clergy, the abbot-bishop, who was the elder of the two bishops, lifted up his thin, sweet voice.

"Deus, in adjutorium meum intende," he chanted.

And like a solid rock of sound came back from every mailed throat before him in response, "Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina."

"Ostende, nobis, Domine, misericordiam tuam."

"Et clamor meus ad te veniat."

It was wonderful! Alain felt his eyes dim, his voice tremble with the emotion the impressive scene, the familiar yet tremendously significant words, called forth.

Not every one present was clerk enough to join in the responses, nor to chant the *Ave Maria* which followed, yet so vast was the volume of accord rolling up to Heaven that it seemed to the listeners that not one voice was lacking of that great body of

soldiers. After the *Ave Maria* was sung the *Confiteor* was said by all the army together, kneeling, and then an act of contrition, after which the bishop, extending his right arm over his mailed flock, gave the absolution with tears in his eyes, remembering that for some of those he absolved it would be the last message from Heaven.



“Stepping in front of his clergy, the abbot-bishop lifted up his thin, sweet voice: ‘*Deus, in adjutorium meum intende,*’ he chanted. And like a solid rock of sound came back the response.”

“And now, my men, the blessing and forgiveness of Heaven asked, and we believe won, turn your thoughts to victory, and remember that we are to take Calais, and bear it as a jewel in our helm back to England!” cried the king, springing to the front as the bishop yielded him place. “St. George for England, and every man here on St. George’s side; it is victory and glory before us! No turning back, no delays! Cheer! cheer! and then on to Calais!”

The cheers King Hal called for rent the air, rose and fell, and rose and fell again. The young monarch turned away with a well-satisfied smile. "Few or many, I'll trust my men to win where I lead them," he said, and not one heart present doubted him right.

Northward the little army marched, weak but valiant; few, yet strong in hope and determination. The king led them across the Somme, and there stopped short. Before them, in all the strength of sixty thousand well-fed men, raging at this invasion of their land, lay the French army. King Hal held a hasty consultation with his nobles. Wise as he was, in spite of his hot-headedness, he had this time miscalculated. The dissensions on which he had reckoned, owing to the insanity of the French king and the two factions rending the realm, had disappeared before the coming of a foreign foe; the starving handful of the English army were face to face with a great body of men in prime condition, having also the great advantage of being in defense of their own soil, breathing the air of their native country.

Retreat was as impossible to Henry's temper as it was in actuality. "What counsel you, my lords?" said the king. But his eyes were flashing, his breath came hard; not a noble there would have dared answer in but one way.

"Give battle, Your Majesty!" cried two or three together.

"We are sick, few, starving, but we can conquer even thus," added Alain, admitted to the council.

"Calais lies beyond that army," said the king, grimly. "We are come out to take Calais. What is it to us that we have to hew our road when we looked to find it clear?"

"Ah, to think of the men, knights, and warriors who are sleeping in their beds this night in England," sighed a sallow lord,

leaning sadly on his shield. "I would we had them at our backs, those idle thousands of Englishmen whom we lack so bitterly in our strait."

King Hal drew himself up to the top of his height, his eyes flashed fire, and his foot made an involuntary movement, as if he kicked some vermin from his path. Alain thought he had never seen him so regal, so splendid.

"I would not have one single man more," cried the king, his young, strong voice ringing out like a trumpet. "If God give us victory, it will be plain that we owe it to His grace. If not, the fewer we are, the less loss to England."

"Before God, there spake a king," cried Sir Thomas Eppingham, with uncontrollable delight. "Harry of England, I served your father, but it would hearten a man to die for such as you."

"Thank you, old friend. When men are heartened to die for their king it is a pledge of living for him," replied the king, laying his hand on the old knight's shoulder. "Now, as we are determined to give our cousins of France a sore struggle, the only thing left to discuss is the method of our warfare. We have seen that the enemy is flanked on either hand by woods, with the front so narrow that it is strong for defense but bad for attack. If we can but draw them forth it will be to our incalculable advantage."

"Surely they will remember Poitiers and Cressy, and wait for us," said Sir Thomas.

King Henry laughed his merry laugh, not easily silenced by the heaviest cares. "To be quite truthful, good Sir Thomas, I doubt the French memory for anything; present fury will drive inherited wisdom to the four winds, I hope. But it is sooth that there lie before us but two courses if they stay entrenched: to re-

treat or to attack. On the horns of this dilemma is there a dastard among us who will hesitate?"

"No! no! no!" shouted every voice in the council.

"Then let the night be prepared for both in setting up camp and making peace with God. Let there be no roystering, no drinking nor gaming. Let psalms and prayers arise, but no ribald songs. God must fight for us, and we must fitly beg His mercy on a desperate attempt," said the king.

"Your Majesty, go yourself to tell them this," said Alain, going up to the king, and laying his hand on his corselet with the loving familiarity King Harry liked. "There is not one who hath seen you as we are seeing you now who would not feel the strength of ten to do battle under such a king."

"Come, then, true heart; I could almost echo that coward's wish, and have you multiplied a thousand times yourself, little as I desire one more man to lessen our glory, or increase our loss, according to the fate hidden beyond the rising of the next sun," said the king, leading Alain from the tent.

The king's orders were faithfully carried out. All night long the rain fell, chill and dreary, but through the hours the wearied English, serious yet brave, made their peace with Heaven; all night the priests listened to the confessions and took the last messages of them who were on the eve of death. Welsh and Scot, Irish and English, all the varied types that made that great-hearted whole, united in the serious preparations, the grave purpose that made them great, and was to count for them on the marvelous morrow against the excitable valor of their less well-balanced foe.

The king did not sleep. Together he and Alain passed the

night in the royal tent, the drip, drip, drip, of the autumn rain beating ceaselessly in the canvas. "To-morrow is St. Crispin's day, Alain," said King Hal, suddenly; "nay, to-day is St. Crispin's, for 'tis past midnight. If you live to see another St. Crispin's dawn you will not forget you spent the vigil of this feast with your king, nor that you cheered him, who, to tell the truth, is sometimes heavier-hearted than he would have it known. You've shown me that the old ideal of honor is not gone out of the world, and I have been happier for your friendship. Now, I go to inspect the lines. Stay you here to rest, and at dawn come forth to join me, and fight a glorious fight under that old castle yonder which is called Agincourt, as I am told."

The French had maintained their position throughout the stormy night; at dawn they held it still, and there was no choice for King Harry but to attack. Starving, sick, outnumbered five to one, there was not a man in all the English army who had not absorbed the spirit of their resolute, daring king. The archers, throwing aside fettering leathern jackets, still less enduring armor, drew their arrows, and, holding their bows taut for the first shower of darts, sprang to the onslaught as if they, not less than their weapons, were winged.

King Henry knew his foe. At the sight of their enemy attacking them, all caution, all recollection of the bitter experience of Cressy and Poitiers fled from the memory of the French. With a frenzied shout they sprang from their strong position, plunging madly on the English front through the rain-soaked field, which was like a morass.

King Harry knew that the unwisdom of his foe had gone far to counterbalance his inferiority of numbers.

“Halt!” cried his resonant voice.

“Halt!” echoed his leaders, and the English line stood fast, while each man planted the sharp palisades he carried, ready for what had happened. Entrenched behind this fortification, sprung like fungus out of the miry ground, the archers poured forth their deadly fire. The French advance wavered, stopped; man after man fell before the awful shower. But the French knights were as gallant as their opponents; rallying their men they led the charge upon the entrenched archers, and drove them finally from their palisades into the woods.

What did it matter, trees or palisades, barricades planted by God or by man? From the woods the arrows still poured forth, now into the French rear, while a desperate conflict between the opposing men-at-arms was fighting in the front.

All down the French line the English flung themselves like ravenous wolves. They knew no fear, they seemed impervious to pain; death itself could hardly be said to hold them. And everywhere, wherever a blow was struck, in all parts of the line at once, rode King Henry, bravest where each man was a hero.

Alain fought after him, never losing sight of the Welsh feathers in his helmet, for at Agincourt, as always, Henry the Fifth was Harry of Monmouth, the Welsh hero. Once Alain saw, with his heart clutched by the sight, the Duke d’Alençon cleave the crown from the king’s helmet. Again a mace, wielded by the hand of a great Norman, felled the king to the ground. But he was up again, and a shout rose from those nearest who had seen it, and Alain’s sword struck down the mace wielder and pinned him fast to earth.

“St. George! England! God for King Hal!” hoarsely



“‘God for King Hal!’ hoarsely shouted the dry English throats.”

shouted the dry English throats as the king, seizing the royal standard from its bearer, sprang on a horse and rushed forward.

A mailed hand snatched the bridle, four hands tugged at the staff of the flag, axes, maces, spears menaced the king.

“England! St. George!” shouted a voice, and Alain knew that its owner was breaking his way to the king’s side, followed by men madly fighting. Before the blows of the leader the French dropped like ripe currants, red, spattering the ground with red, as he had seen them in the Warwickshire orchards.

Some one—the same leader—freed the terrified horse from his assailants. Some one seized by the throat a mail-clad demon who was raising his mace to crush the king. Some one followed the king, who dashed forward through the path cleared for him, fighting madly. Some one found himself at the king’s side in a lull—was it hours or moments after that frenzied sally? Some one heard the king receive the word that the field was won, the French reserve at that moment being routed, heard King Hal say, as he doffed his battered helmet: “God hath won this battle for us against such fearful odds. To Him be praise and thanksgiving.”

Then Alain awoke from the delirium of courage in which he had passed the last hour of the battle, and knew, knew because his king was thanking him, and his name was echoing on all sides in praise as the leader of that final onslaught to victory, that he was the some one who had done these deeds, that he was at the side of the king in the moment of triumph at Agincourt.

The trumpets called to rest. Eleven thousand French lay in eternal rest on that awful field; the dead and dying of both sides were massed upon each other. But as the glory of Agincourt alone is remembered of that battle, so the groans of the fallen

were drowned in the psalms of triumph, the solemn *Te Deum* chanted above their mangled bodies.

King Henry drew about him the remnant of the army with which he set forth from England in August. It was now October; winter was fast approaching, and it would be impossible to carry on the campaign with the little enfeebled band of men left the English king. It was decided that the march to Calais should be continued, but to embark thence for home, there to recuperate and prepare the army for future victories on French soil. Alain's work was undone; for him there could be no return to England until Isabel was found.

"Go your way, then, brave knight, to the rescue of the fair lady," said the king, when Alain reminded him of this duty, and craved his permission for a parting which has become most undesirable to the youth, then at the very age of hero-worshiping, and who saw in the conqueror of Agincourt the embodiment of his ideals. "That I owe you my life once is certain; that you saved it again on the field of Agincourt is probable, and that I love you well is beyond peradventure. Find your cousin, but make haste in the doing of it, and return to England and King Harry, who will be the friend of the Darringtons while he sees the sun."

"Then I will set forth toward Rouen, Your Majesty, and with a heavy heart in leaving your service. But I can never be wholly any man's man, not even my king's nor my own, till I have righted the wrong done by my father, of which so much is beyond reparation," said Alain, kissing the royal hand.

"Farewell, my true heart. God prosper thee! And tell Rouen she shall see me soon," added the king, with a laugh.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ADVENTURES OF LADY ISABEL.

WHEN Isabel, obeying rather those who guided her steps than any interest in her own safety, continued her flight to France, her first halting place had been at the monastery whither Alain had gone to inquire for tidings of her. There the news of her father's execution, not the less awful for being awaited, reached her; there, too, came to her the body of her murdered brother, the severing of the last link that bound her to life. After she had seen the child for whose sake only she had been able to summon fortitude to leave her father to meet death alone laid away in the peaceful cloister for his unending rest, with faithful Jude sleeping forever across his feet, the future appeared to her one unbroken blank of hopeless grief, her own fate a matter of supreme indifference, since, homeless and bereft of all she loved, happiness could never be hers again.

But Hugo and Dame Winifred thought otherwise; they, taking advantage of the lethargy into which the poor girl had fallen, and that she was too indifferent to her future to oppose them, bore her toward Calais without loss of time, forcing her to the sole refuge left her on earth.

The landing of the three fugitives in Calais preceded by but two days that of the English king at Havre; between them and the abbey beyond Rouen, whither Isabel was bound, lay two opposing

armies and a country hostile to everything English. The problem of conveying her to her destination, young and fair as she was, slender as her supply of gold had become, and with only Dame Winifred to assist him, was one which cost Hugo many anxious hours to solve, and which, after all, was no nearer its solution than at first. Finally, after vain planning and hoping for means to ensure a speedy and safe passage from Calais to Rouen, Hugo resolved to trust to Providence, and set forth toward that city, for every day's delay made dangerous inroads on their attenuated purse.

Dame Winifred and her young mistress had obtained palfreys, but Hugo made the journey afoot, saving the expense of a horse and his oats, yet rendering their progress much slower. It took several days to reach Arras, and they attained that town at nightfall of a day when a fair had been held, and the entire population was keeping festival. At the gates a band of roughs came up with the travelers and demanded that the two women should raise their veils, and prove whether or not they had claim to beauty. Hugo, alone against six, strove in vain to protect his mistress. Cudgels were wielded on both sides, and Hugo, finding himself unequal to his task, called upon Lady Isabel and Dame Winifred to ride to the nearest church or abbey, saying that he would find them when the hour was more propitious. Dame Winifred, in affright, less for herself than for her nursling, seized Isabel's bridle and dashed forward to obey. Shouts and songs arose on every side, and the frightened horses, pulling wildly apart, soon got free from hands quite unequal to managing two, and Isabel found herself alone in the crowd, separated from both her protectors. She rode toward the town, feeling more secure

even among the terrors of the revels than alone on the outskirts of the crowd, but she was not suffered to proceed far. Three young gallants caught her horse's bridle, and two more rudely pulled her from the saddle and raised her veil.

Her cries for help were not heeded, the temper of the crowd being to allow any sort of merry-making, probably assuming that those who objected to the order of the day would not be abroad. Isabel had begun to despair of rescue when eight big country bumpkins came up, arms locked in a solid wedge, and attacked her captors, whether for her sake, or merely for the sake of a fight, could not be certain. Nor did it much matter, since the immediate effect of their onslaught was to cause the first band of better-dressed, but worse-mannered, ruffians to unhand Isabel and defend themselves with their utmost vigor.

"There's a shed yonder, around the corner, and down the next lane," one of the newcomers took breath to say. "Run to that, and hide in the straw, mademoiselle; when we're done with this gang we'll come and conduct you to your friends."

Little inclined as Isabel was to trust this counsel, any refuge was better than none, and she set off at once in the direction indicated, leaving her uncouth knights to do battle for her. She found the shed, and crept into it, hiding under the clean straw, and waited with beating heart for the next page of her story.

It seemed long to her, but was actually but a short time, before the rescuing party appeared, leading her horse, triumph seated on their heated brows.

"We've made those beruffled knaves take to their heels, mademoiselle," said one in rustic French. "It will be a time before they will be pretty enough to molest a lady again."

"I hope you have not harmed them?" said Isabel, coming forth with a show of courage.

"Only a matter of a cracked head or so, some blackened eyes, smashed ribs, and mayhap a leg that likes cushions better than running," replied the spokesman. "Nothing near what they deserved for troubling a young lady. Would your grace tell us how we can serve you?"

"Thou speakest like a courtier, Jean," whispered one of his companions loudly, nudging the speaker admiringly, while Isabel replied: "I am an English lady, but lately orphaned, and beggared by the villainy of those who should have been kinder. I am on my way to an abbey beyond Rouen, where my aunt, from whom alone I can hope for assistance, is abbess. The good man and woman who were with me, the only friends I have left from happier days, are taking me thither. They were separated from me by ruffians who attacked us at the gate. Hugo—my man—fought them single-handed, bidding Winifred and me to ride to a church, where he would try to join us later. Then I fell upon the knaves whom you so opportunely routed, my woman was separated from me, and now I am alone. If you can hide me safely, and find my good Dame Winifred and Hugo, and bring them to me, Heaven will bless and thank you fittingly, as I never can."

An instinct told Isabel that her only hope lay in simple trust in these country youths, and the instinct did not mislead her. Wiping his eyes on the sleeve of his jacket, the one called Jean said: "A most affecting tale, and one that would move a stone when told by so beautiful a lady. My lady, if you will trust me, I hope I can serve you. My sister is ill. She and her three weeks' babe have a low fever, and the old woman nursing her is not able

to check it. I know that the nobles sometimes have knowledge of herbs. If you will come to my sister, I will tell her only your story; the neighbors shall think you other than you are, and that you are a wise woman. You shall stay in the cottage till I can find your escorts, and, if it is a year hence, you will be safe in the hands of my sister and her husband, who is a wood-carver by trade, and a harmless man."

"How can I thank you?" cried Isabel, with genuine gratitude and relief. "I will gladly go with you, and I am thankful that I may also be useful to you. Though I am young I am somewhat learned in simples, for my mother has been dead for years, and Dame Winifred hath taught me the use of herbs that I might take my mother's place in ministering to the poor, as becomes the chatelaine of a castle where there are many tenants."

The rustic bowed low. "I knew you were a lady of noble birth," he said. "If you will deign to honor my sister's roof it will be our part to be grateful. And now, my lady, may I venture to ask a favor? The streets are full of roysterers, some wicked, some only mischievous, but all in a mood to be troublesome to a young and fair lady if she is seen by them. Will you put on some few pieces of clumsy armor I have here, and wear it as we go to my sister's house? It will protect you by making you pass unnoticed, and there is great wisdom in caution, though there are six of us."

"Jean speaks like a priest," cried one of the other youths. "Better do it, my lady; it might go hard with you if you were seen."

"Give me the armor," said Isabel. "I can not do less than obey those who are risking their safety for me, and I will not leave

undone anything that might save them from being embroiled in another encounter for my sake."

"As to that, my lady," said Jean, with great earnestness, "never trouble yourself, for we are grateful for a good fight, and we have had a beautiful one, and would thank the saints for letting us have another honestly; it is for your sake only we would have you conceal yourself under this rusty harness." So saying, he produced parts of a suit of mail, rusty, indeed, and clumsy, but which had been worn by a slender youth evidently, for, as Isabel fitted it to her delicate, lithe frame, it was not so large but that she could contrive to keep within it. Only the upper part of her body was to be thus disguised; Jean decided that the darkness, which was fast deepening, would conceal her skirts if she rode with her little feet thrust in the iron boots, and drew her palfrey's trappings somewhat over her knees.

Fully equipped at last, the little party sallied forth and arrived without adventure at the tiny cottage which Jean indicated as the home of the wood-carver, who was his brother-in-law. The kind youth led Isabel into the little house, told in a few words the story of her misfortunes and his finding her, and, leaving her with promises of return on the morrow, went away to find Hugo and Dame Winifred, if they were still in Arras.

A fire on the hearth was the only light in the narrow stone room in which Isabel found herself. The master of the house was away, engaged at his trade in a neighboring monastery, and its mistress, a girl not more than two years the senior of Isabel herself, lay on the high bed built in the wall at one end of the room, a young baby at her side, very ill, as her guest could see at a glance. Her attendant was also absent, and when Jean had closed



"Isabel fitted it to her delicate, lithe frame."

the door behind him Isabel went up to the bed, her own situation forgotten in her anxiety to relieve Anne, for thus Jean had called his sister.

The little baby was whimpering softly; Isabel's first task was to warm milk, which she found in the cupboard, feed the little creature, and lay it to sleep on a settle at a distance from its suffering mother. Then she set open the door, admitting the sweet summer air, prepared a cooling draft for her patient, bathed her hands and face with fresh water from the well, and had the satisfaction of seeing Anne drop into quiet slumber, an example her young nurse was too anxious to follow.

The next day there was still no tidings of Hugo and Dame Winifred. Isabel tried to content herself with her nursing, and trust Heaven to bring back to her the sole friends she could count upon on earth. It was not easy, yet there was need enough of some one who had even rudimentary knowledge of illness in the little home to which she had been so singularly led. She was fully occupied. With all her heart Isabel blessed the good woman who had taught her to be useful to the poor. Her science was not great, but with it she managed to concoct remedies from the herbs at hand, to treat the fever with untiring watchfulness, and to relieve the discomfort imposed on Anne by the ignorance of her well-meaning old nurse, till the rapid pulse abated under the relaxation of nerves her ministrations wrought. The baby, too, grew happier, and less pale in Isabel's loving hands, and in return made these bitter days bearable to the poor girl, for Isabel was a true woman, and found the touch of baby hands most healing to her aching heart.

The good peasants, to whom the beautiful young lady seemed

like a sort of miracle wrought by Heaven for their benefit, was so grateful for the good she did them that they could not be made to see how much Isabel owed to their intervention in her behalf, and when the young mother, her fever quite left her, was able to sit up, pillowed in her somber bed, there was a little festival held by the happy family, over which Isabel presided as the good angel to whom this restoration was due.

Among themselves they talked softly, ashamed of their own selfishness, of the happiness it would be if Hugo and Dame Winifred were never found, and the Lady Isabel could remain always the guardian of their welfare.

While Isabel had been thus strangely employed, Hugo and Dame Winifred, who had discovered each other shortly after Isabel had disappeared, had searched vainly through the length and breadth of the town for their charge. Just as they were giving up hope, and deciding that she was dead or spirited away by villains to the worst fate of all of her unhappy race, Jean stumbled upon them as he was leaving a little old church in an unfrequented quarter of the town; he had been ceaselessly following the only clew he had to a meeting with them, and had haunted the churches and abbeys for miles around, since Hugo had bidden his mistress in parting, go to such an asylum to await him. Jean felt certain the moment his eyes fell upon the strangers that they were those he sought. A word was sufficient to assure him of it, and, with mingled joy and regret, he led them to his sister's dwelling.

Isabel, seated by the bed, telling her patient tales of life in the land across the channel, so near, yet so different in language, customs, and race, heard Hugo's step on the stone outside the

door, and started to her feet. The cry she uttered when Hugo and her dear old nurse burst into the room waked the baby to frightened wailing, but Isabel for once was deaf to the cries of her little pet. She was a baby herself, sobbing with joy on her kind old nurse's shoulder, clinging to the hand of the faithful big man who, when she was scarce more than a baby, had ridden



“Isabel, seated by the bed, heard Hugo’s step on the stone outside the door, and started to her feet. The cry she uttered when Hugo and her dear old nurse burst into the room waked the baby to frightened wailing.”

her on his arm around the moat of her beloved Darrington, which she should never see again.

With tears on both sides, and thanks no less sincere from Isabel to the good people who had rescued her, than were theirs to the gracious and beautiful lady to whose care they were convinced Anne owed her life, Isabel parted from the humble friends

Providence had mercifully brought to her in her hour of need. She could not tear herself from Anne's clinging arms till she had promised to return to Arras if happier days ever dawned for her, and Jean could not let the beautiful vision he worshiped from afar fade from his eyes till the last moment; he rode with Hugo, Dame Winifred, and Isabel far on the road toward Amiens, whither they were bound first on their way to Rouen, and left when the sun was high with a heavy heart, riding back with hanging head and slackened rein, and it may be that it was because the September sunshine was so bright that his eyes were too dimmed to see the road stretching before him back of Arras.

Isabel and her insufficient escort reached Amiens without further adventure. They took refuge in an inn, Dame Winifred and the young girl keeping entirely to their apartment, while Hugo found congenial companionship in the common room below stairs.

Among the men gathered about the fire was one, a servant, but evidently a higher servant of some noble. He seemed curious as to Hugo's business, but after vainly trying to discover its nature, he abandoned such attempts, and throwing off a surliness of manner which at first distinguished him from those around him, joined merrily in the songs and toasts which the hostess' good red wine called forth.

But as Hugo took his candle, and started with it unlighted down the narrow passage toward bed, he came suddenly upon this same servant in company with another man whose face and condition he could not make out. As he approached he heard the servant say: "I'll wager my head she's worth the risk, and is high-born and beautiful. I saw her dismount, and her air was

regal. My lord will have all the opportunity he wishes, for they start in the morning south—”

The other, who was facing Hugo, moved, probably to nudge his companion into silence. Then he said, more loudly than the other had spoken: “I tell you, man, I don’t want another horse, nor can your allusions to her noble descent move me. Besides, I am going north, so it will be impossible for me to go look at her.”

Both made way for Hugo to pass; he saw the face of the second speaker then, young, handsome, but sinister, and wicked. He continued his way down the narrow passage with foreboding heart. Why had these men tried to conceal the subject of their conversation from him? Tried, too, so ineffectually, for evidently the servant spoke of a human creature, not a horse; horses are dismounted from, but never dismount, and that with regal air.

“Wickedness, probably, but it does not follow it concerns me,” said Hugo at last, rising from the bed where he had sat considering. “There may be many things such a pair as that want no one to know. I will not anticipate evil, since it comes to us fast enough of late.”

In the morning Isabel’s journey was resumed. They rode till late in the day, meeting with no adventure. Then they entered a piece of woods through which Hugo urged their horses to greater speed.

As they rode abreast of a specially dark clump of trees a voice called from their depths commanding them to halt, and an arrow whizzed past Isabel’s horse’s ear to enforce the demand. As they reined up four men dashed out of the thicket, two of whom at once engaged with Hugo, while each of the others seized one of the horses ridden by the two women. Hugo fought desperately, but in vain.

A blow on his bare head, from which the helmet had been torn in the struggle, ended his power of resistance; he fell senseless to the ground, and the attacking party wasted no more time upon him.

One of the villains darted into the thicket whence they had emerged, and brought out four horses, while the other three bound Isabel and Dame Winifred to their palfreys, their arms made powerless at their sides. Then, mounting their own fresh animals, two of the party took each a bridle of the horses bearing their prisoners, the third led Hugo's horse. They rode rapidly away, heeding Isabel's cries and prayers and Dame Winifred's no more than the chirping of the autumn insects in the wood, and leaving Hugo, alive or dead, no one knew or cared which, on the moss where he had fallen. But if he could have opened his sealed eyes he would have seen, as the wretches threw back their masks, and drew their reins taut, that one bore the face of the servant, and another the diabolically handsome countenance of the master with whom he had been conspiring when he had passed them in the narrow passage the night before.

But Hugo's eyes were closed beneath white lids, and his beloved young mistress dashed through the forest in the hands of her captors, and disappeared over the brow of the hill.

CHAPTER XII.

A DARRINGTON TO THE RESCUE.

KING HENRY the Fifth had returned to England for those two years of preparation which preceded his second campaign in France and the capture of Rouen. And Alain Darrington had regretfully parted from his royal master to pursue his way to that city, where he hoped to discover Isabel. Turning southward from Calais he came to Arras just as, unknown to him, the object of his search had done three months earlier.

He rode alone, save for Roger, his squire—like a true knight-errant, his lady's embroidered sleeve still quilted through his helmet.

Thus he came to Arras, and thus he appeared to a rustic of whom he stopped to inquire the way. "Your horses are weary, sir," said the young man. "See how their heads droop; they are longing for a fresh draft of water. If you will follow me to yonder little cottage my sister will gladly give you and them refreshment, for it is half an hour more to the nearest inn, and as it is a holiday there might not be place for you when you arrived there."

"Thank you, friend; it is a kind offer and one I will gladly accept," returned Alain. "How are you called that I may know the proper manner of addressing my host?"

"Jean, my lord, but I am not your host. My sister Anne is

married to a wood-carver, and it is his house to which I am leading you," returned Jean.

"Ah! And I am Alain Darrington of— But what's the matter?" cried Alain, for his guide had stopped short, and was staring at him in open-mouthed amazement.

"Darrington! Are you kin to Lady Isabel of that name?" cried Jean.

It was Alain's turn to stare. "Miracles and wonders!" he gasped at last. "What can you, a French peasant of Arras, know of my cousin?"

"Your cousin! Then you are one of that dastard brood who have robbed her!" cried Jean, in increasing excitement. "I know all, because Hugo hath told me. And I know that I saved her from the hands of villains here, and brought her to this very house where you are now going, and that she abode here, and nursed my sister, and saved her life, like the angel she is, and if you were not my guest I would strike you dead for the wrong you have done her."

"Softly, softly, good Jean," said Alain, not much less disturbed than the faithful fellow to whom he was speaking. "Let us go more slowly and be more just. When you hear why I am in France you will be less wroth with me; in a word, my sole errand is to discover the Lady Isabel and restore to her her rights, of which neither I nor my brother deprived her. God Himself," he added, taking off the plumed cap he wore, while his helmet hung at his saddle, "must have led me to you, that you may help me in my search."

Both young men reached the wood-carver's house in a state of joyful disturbance, for when Jean learned that it was not the

foe, but a true friend of his lady with whom he had to deal, he whiffled over to the most enthusiastic admiration for him, and by the time Anne and her baby made them welcome at the door Jean was ready to leave all other interests and accompany Alain to the ends of earth in his chivalrous quest. The wood-carver, arriving later, had to hear the wonderful story over again; indeed,



"Instantly the battlements were swarming with activity; men-at-arms ran hither and yon, armed, too, as could be seen plainly from below, till at last some one in authority, apparently, stood forth upon a buttress and demanded their business."

the three peasants and their guests passed the night in hearing and telling the history of the remarkable events of the past months, although Alain did not find it necessary to explain fully the wrong committed by his father. When, toward morning, Alain lay down to sleep, it had been arranged that Jean was to accompany him to Rouen, supplementing his knowledge of the country and language, and serving him in every way in his power,

for his own sake as well as that of his cousin, for Jean had conceived unbounded affection for the young man who could sacrifice so much for honor.

There was no dallying on the journey, nor delay in setting forth. Alain, with Roger and Jean, made good speed along the pleasant roads, and halted at a castle outside Amiens in fewer days than it had taken Isabel and her convoy to make the same distance some weeks earlier. The castle at which they stopped stood beyond the city to the westward, set back among thick weeds, a frowning hill enforcing it at the rear. Night was coming on, and the travelers' horses were too weary to cover the rest of the distance between this point and an inn, else had they passed at a respectful distance the gloomy pile which appeared so menacing.

Making the best of a necessity, however, they rode up to within hail of its walls, and called upon the warder to open to three fore-spent men who craved a night's hospitality on their journey. Instantly the battlements were swarming with activity; men-at-arms ran hither and yon, armed, too, as could be seen plainly from below, till at last some one in authority, apparently, stood forth upon a buttress and demanded their business.

"Nothing more than has been already said," returned Roger, spokesman through having the mightiest voice. "We are travelers to Rouen, on private business, and our horses are too weary to bear us into Amiens. We ask your hospitality, as we would gladly accord you ours were the case reversed."

Some moments passed, probably spent in consultation, before a small gate was opened and the travelers were bidden enter. As it closed behind them, and the bolt flew back into its place, Alain had somewhat the sensation of a hare whose confidence in entering

the trap deserts him at the thought of quitting it. There was nothing to be done but to bear themselves bravely and unsuspectingly, having entered, and Alain, setting the example, flung himself from his tired beast with what he hoped was an air of cheerful alacrity.

"The master of this castle is not here," said a man, coming forward to meet them, with most ungracious mien. "He is not far distant, but until he comes I, who am called Jacques Nicolas, represent him, and bid you welcome, if your errand is as innocent as you say; if not, so much the worse for you."

"Is it customary in France, the land of courtesy, to welcome guests with a thinly veiled threat?" asked Alain, pleasantly. "Our errand is not other than we say, my friend, and if you will suffer us and our horses to rest the night we will go away as peaceably as we came, thanking you heartily for your hospitality. If it would not offend you to speak of recompense, I would say that we will gladly requite you for our supper, both for man and beasts."

Jacques frowned. "This is not an inn," he said, shortly. "What we give, we give. You are welcome to a night's rest here, if that is all you want, and Castel Malheureux is not so poor as to require payment for what it dispenses."

"Thanks, friend; I felt certain you would reply thus," said Alain, determined to seem pleased. "Castel Malheureux! What a singular name!"

"It pleases us," returned Jacques. "It fits those who assail it; unlucky is he of a certainty who attempts to force it. It has not won its name from the condition of those who abide in it."

"But those who visit it!" thought Alain, finishing the implied

latter half of his host's sentence. "Well, we shall see, and trust to escaping the import."

It was not a very propitious beginning, nor precisely an appetizing sauce to the supper set before the travelers, but they contrived to make a good meal, and the viands were of the best. The inmates of the castle, showing no desire for further acquaintance with the strangers, assigned to them a corner of the main hall, where the fire burned brightly on the hearth as it had done at Darrington, and they spread rugs and skins abundantly for their guests to sleep on. Then they withdrew to the opposite side of the great space and made no advances toward sociability.

There was an atmosphere of danger all about; something dark and sinister seemed to brood over the entire pile. The three strangers agreed to take turns in watching and sleeping, for they felt that slumber of all at once might menace their waking in the morning. A narrow window, high up above their heads, let in the fresh night air, helping them to wakefulness, for the air of the hall was heavily impure with unpleasant odors and artificial heat.

It was Roger's turn at watching, and might have been something more than an hour past midnight. Alain and Jean slept. Suddenly there rang out on the night air a woman's scream, so piercing, so agonized, that Alain and Jean sprang to their feet with one impulse, and saw that Roger, holding his shield high in his left hand, was fighting desperately with his right against a band of armed men, the number of whom Alain could not stop to conjecture. And above the clash of steel arose again that anguished woman's cry, calling upon God to save her.

"My armor!" cried Alain. He had imprudently laid off the

upper portion when he had lain down, and as Jean buckled it around him he cried: "Courage, Roger; I am coming!" Alain armed, Jean snatched up his sword, and together the two youths sprang to the conflict, laying about them with such hearty goodwill that for a moment it seemed as though they might force their way through the tremendous superiority of numbers by sheer strength of nerve and courage. But the odds were far too heavy against them to make such an outcome possible, and it had gone hard with the three strangers had not a shout arisen from outside and a trumpet been blown. Its effect was magical; in an instant all the spears and swords dropped, the leader of the force within the castle called a halt, and every man leaned forward in a listening attitude, hand to ear, body resting on one foot. Once more the trumpet sounded, then a voice, shrill, high, excited, the voice of a child, arose under the window above the spot where Alain and his followers had lain.

"Come forth! come forth!" shouted the voice. "Your lord is slain; my brother is dead! I am lord over you! Come forth, I say!"

"Dead!" echoed many voices, in tones of wonder, rage, but not sorrow. Then with a sudden, unanimous impulse every man in the hall turned and rushed to the door, and clattered down the stone stairway, forgetting their three opponents, who followed them without hesitation. On the grass below the walls stood the boy whose voice had reached them, a child of twelve or thirteen years, his face purple with excitement, holding a sword aloft in his brown hand. But though he had just announced his brother's death in his piping treble, there was no sorrow in his face either; mad excitement was there, an expression of something horribly

like triumph and joy shone in his dilated eyes, and on his young countenance, that yet seemed old and hardened.

“I am your lord!” he cried, the instant the men had all assembled. “You have solemnly sworn to acknowledge me if my brother were to die; keep your vow.”

“You are our lord, young Raoul, but during your minority you will have a regent over your kingdom, and I will be that regent,” said Jacques. “This is no time to discuss your claims, boy. How did your brother die, and when?”

“He died by the hand of the woman who is imprisoned with the young English lady in the château on the hill,” replied the boy. “All this long time he has tried to coax that beautiful lady to receive him, and he has taken me with him. She shrank from him in terror, and he always gave way to her will, taking his leave respectfully, but promising to come again, and yet again, until she should look upon his suit with favor. And each time she has told him that she should never listen to him, but should always abhor the villain who carried her off by force, slew her faithful man, and kept her prisoner. And as she has spoken I have listened and have known she was right, and that my brother was the villain she called him, and I have hated him. And to-night, to-night, when he went alone to her prison, leaving me behind, I knew there was wrong to her afoot, and I followed him. And when he tried to force his way to that beautiful English girl I knew that he would drive her to her death, for I had visited her alone, and offered to help her, and she had blessed me, telling me she had had a brother near my age who had been cruelly murdered, and for his sake, and my goodness to her, she loved me. But she said I was not to fear for her, for if all other friends were taken



“ ‘ My armor,’ cried Alain, and Jean buckled it around him.”

from her, one was left, and she showed me the window, and I knew she would leap to death if need be. So to-night, when the wretch whom I disown went to persecute her, and there was none to befriend her, Dame Winifred, glorious Dame Winifred, slew him with the knife she carried in her bosom, and Lady Isabel was saved."

Alain had never seen such passionate triumph as this strange boy showed, but all thought of it was swallowed up in amazement, wonder, at the names he heard. Isabel! Winifred! What could it mean? Was it possible that Providence had sent him to his cousin in her dire necessity, that it was she who had been taken prisoner by a villain who had paid duly the price of his crimes?

He sprang to the fore, and grasped the boy's arm, who looked at him, marveling, for he had not heard of the stranger's arrival. "Boy, who is this lady of whom you speak? Have you heard her name?" he cried.

The boy measured him with an eye that had early learned estimating men. Apparently he decided favorably to the young stranger; perhaps his English tongue made Raoul hope he would prove kind to the prisoner in the château. "She is the Lady Isabel Darrington," he said.

"Gracious heaven! My cousin, and in such a plight!" cried Alain. "My boy, I have come from England solely to find this sweet, unfortunate girl, but I thought to discover her safe in an abbey near Rouen; I never dreamed she was in such danger. Take me to her, I beg you, and use your new authority to set her free and save her from the hands of these men."

"*These men*, as the stranger calls us, have some claim on you, young Raoul," said Jacques. "If you have no natural desire to avenge your brother, I at least will see to it that the woman who

slew him has her deserts. I demand that she be given up to us at once to be dealt with. As to the girl, she shall be ransomed, if she be the noble dame she claims to be. But this stranger, how can we know him for her cousin? You will dismiss him to the dungeon to wait our verdict."

For reply Raoul turned to the men-at-arms. "How many are true men?" he cried. "How many have had enough of Jacques' cruelty, crimes, arrogance? How many will keep their oaths and obey me?"

"I! and I! and I!" cried many voices. The boy flushed proudly. "I thought I could not be the only true heart in this accursed place, truly the Castel Malheureux. Obey my first command, then: seize Jacques!" So many hands were stretched to execute the command, without one to resist it, that it was evident hatred for Jacques was a prevailing sentiment.

"Now to the dungeon with him, and shackle him well." The men bore away the former lieutenant of the dead master of the castle, and the boy watched him disappear with infinite satisfaction written on his face.

"My lord," said Raoul, whose ability to lead was so far in excess of his years that it could be accounted for but by his early schooling in a hard life. "If you are the Lady Isabel's cousin, as you claim to be, I am thankful you have come, but I must not wrong her by admitting to her a stranger. Dame Winifred will know you, if you speak the truth; come to that brave woman, who has, like a heroine, saved her mistress at the price of her own peace."

"Unfortunately," said Alain, sadly, "neither my cousin nor her old nurse has ever seen me. We have grown up apart

from each other, and I beg you not to doubt me if I have difficulty in establishing my identity. I feel certain that after a time I can convince Dame Winifred that I am myself."

"She will surely know me for her friend," said Jean, stepping forward. "Take me to her if you doubt us, for the good angels not long since enabled me to do her a service who is little less than an angel herself."

"How about the token in your helmet which wise Lady Margaret, your mother, placed there, Master Alain?" asked Roger. "Surely Dame Winifred will recognize the bit of velvet sleeve which belike she embroidered for her little lady with her own hands."

"True, true, Roger; the embroidered sleeve!" cried Alain, rapturously. "It had entirely escaped my memory. Lead us to the brave Dame Winifred, good, faithful master Raoul, both Jean and myself. And hasten, for my poor cousin hath sorrowed long and bitterly; it is time Heaven sent her comfort, and none but Heaven itself led us to this gloomy castle on this eventful night."

"Follow me!" said Raoul, briefly, and led the way up the hill at the rear of the castle.

CHAPTER XIII.

DARRINGTON OF DARRINGTON ONCE MORE.

RAOUL led Alain and his two companions up the hill in perfect silence. The woods were thick, and it seemed to them they had gone a long distance, owing to the windings of the path when they had actually climbed but a few tens of feet. They had not nearly attained the summit of the steep ascent when Raoul made a sharp turn to the right, and brought them suddenly into a clearing from which they looked almost straight across to the castle, the trees which had once intercepted the view having been cut away.

On this clearing, serving as a lawn and pleasure ground, stood a tiny château, or, more correctly, chalet; Alain instantly recognized it as his cousin's prison, and understood, as he looked across at the castle, what had puzzled him before, how the woman's scream could be so plainly heard in the great hall.

"This way," said Raoul, briefly, and led them farther toward the front of the château. There in the grass, darkened by his blood, lay a man as he had fallen, the head thrown back, the right hand clutching a poignard, the left extended, its fingers dug into the grass in the convulsion of death; the face, though there was no one there to recognize it in that connection, was that of the man whom Hugo had discovered plotting with his servant in the dark passage in the inn on the night before Isabel's capture.

Raoul walked up to the body, drew his short dagger, and pointed to the prostrate figure with a passionate motion of both arms.

“There he lies, dead; slain, and richly deserving his fate!” he cried. “Must I mourn for him because he was my brother? I hated his crimes; I hated to feel that we were sons of the same father; thank Heaven, my dear mother was not his mother. I would have been willing to die to have saved the poor girl he had in his power from a marriage to him; you do not blame me that I rejoice that the brave woman with her knew how to use her dagger as true as a man, and delivered her mistress? You have no conception of the crimes committed in yonder Castle of Misfortune, and by him, and how I had to see them, helpless, from my babyhood.”

Alain laid his hand gently on the lad's shoulder. “My brave and good Raoul,” he said, “there is no real kinship between such as you, and such as he hath been. But he is dead; dead in the midst of sin, with no moment in which to make his peace with God. Let us try to forget his crimes, or remember them but to repair them. It will be the work of your life to undo his, and turn yonder Castel Malheureux into Castel Bienfaisance.”

“You have named it; it shall be worthy that name, if God gives me life and strength to compass it,” cried Raoul. “And now let me take you to your cousin.”

“To Dame Winifred first, so please you; I should not like to startle poor Lady Isabel, who has slender reason of late to anticipate good in seeing the advent of strangers.”

It was difficult to find Dame Winifred. Raoul led the way into the house, but every room through which they passed was deserted,

and they were beginning to feel alarm, and to wonder if the two women had been rash enough to take flight alone rather than stay to face the consequences of Dame Winifred's act, when just as they were quitting one of the silent chambers, a glad cry rang out, and Dame Winifred rushed forth from behind a panel which suddenly slid back in the wall, and seized Jean in her arms, crying: "Jean! Jean! for the love of Heaven tell me how came you here, and who are these in your company?"

The good boy sobbed aloud in excitement not less than hers. "We came here on our way to Rouen to find Lady Isabel," he replied. "God led us to this place to-night when you needed us most. This young gentleman with me is Sir Alain Darrington, the Lady Isabel's cousin, who has been four months out of England looking for her, to bring her to her own again."

Dame Winifred looked at Alain with amazement, but with a distrust which may be pardoned her in view of all that had happened.

"Sir Gaspar's son?" she exclaimed. "Do you expect me to believe that one of that brood, who hath robbed my darling, murdered my lord and that blessed boy, and brought sorrow upon us which nothing can wipe out, has come to France for any good to Lady Isabel? No; let me get my child away from here, for these are but new enemies, and we can bear no more."

"Dame Winifred," said Alain, gently, "I do not blame you that you find it hard to trust me, but only listen. My father is dead, slain in combat with a true friend of Lord Darrington, who rode to Darrington to avenge him. My brother and I, our mother, too, who is a saint, and has taught us to deal justly with all men as we hope for mercy, were entirely ignorant of the wrong done



"Raoul pointed to the prostrate figure with a passionate motion,"

by my father, and powerless to help it, until he was dead. Then we said we would rather starve than keep estates and titles won thus. My brother stayed at Darrington to administer affairs till my cousin could be brought back, and I hastened to London to ask the king to reinstate him. I was too late; Lord Darrington was dead, the king had sailed for France. I followed him, fought under him at Agincourt, and then obtained permission to leave him and bring back Lady Isabel to her own again. Providence brought me to Jean, who could tell me something of your movements. If you can doubt that our arrival at this den of iniquity last night was wrought by the hand of Providence, then you are hard to convince. For myself, I thank Heaven that a sign has been given me that my efforts are blessed, and God will **not** hold us guilty of our father's wrong." He bared his head reverently as he spoke, and Dame Winifred's eyes fell on the blue velvet embroidered with pearls quilted through the bars of his helmet.

"What is that?" she cried, sharply, pointing to it.

"Lady Isabel's sleeve, which my mother brought me from her chamber at Darrington, and placed here, that when I found my cousin she would know it was I, and that a mother's love waited her at home in the heart of my mother, who hath given her youngest son to search for her, and bring her back with him," said Alain, lifting the helmet for Dame Winifred to see his token plainly.

The good woman began to tremble, and to weep softly as she fondled the bit of blue. "I wrought that sleeve for my darling myself to wear on her blessed mother's feast day," she said. "You could not have thought of this yourself; I believe it was your mother who placed that there, and I must trust her love and good-

ness who will, as you say, risk her son, and so young a son, that right may be brought out of wrong. Follow me to your cousin, or stay! Let Jean come with me first alone, for my darling is so worn and frightened that I dare not risk letting her see a strange face first. Since we came here each man who has come near her has approached her but with new cruelty."

Dame Winifred, drying her eyes, led the way toward the door, and Jean followed proudly. To the surprise of all she went out of the house and turned up the hill; when she had preceded them to a little distance, Raoul led Alain and Roger after her, and waited in the shadow of the trees to be summoned.

In less time than they looked for her return, Dame Winifred reappeared, and bade them follow her to her mistress. Alain went with beating heart; he could not face the young girl whose father had died through his own father's crime, without dreading the interview. Dame Winifred conducted them silently to a little group of trees, beneath the boughs of which she stooped, and brought them into a sort of tiny grove. Here they saw Jean standing, and kneeling in the farthest corner a slender, drooping figure in long draperies which concealed her face.

"Here is your cousin, Sweeting," said Dame Winifred, gently, and raised her up in her strong arms.

A great pity for the fragile creature who had been made to bear so much, drove out of Alain's mind all thought of himself, and gave him the instinct to do and say the right thing. Going softly over to the girl, clinging timidly to her old nurse, he took both her little cold hands and raised them to his lips. "I have come to take you home to Darrington, dear Isabel," he said, simply. "Mother loves you very much, and is

waiting for you; all her daughters are dead. We can not get on without you, and you must come with me to comfort her, for you know it is harder for us to feel our father did the wrong than for you to know yours suffered by it."

If he had known Isabel from her cradle he could not have more surely struck the right chord. In all her young life she had



"Dame Winifred, drying her eyes, led the way to the door, and Jean followed proudly. To the surprise of all, she went out of the house, and turned up the hill."

never thought first of herself, nor failed to give affection and sympathy to those she believed needed it.

As Alain spoke of his mother, the mother of only dead girls, her heart went out to the woman bereft—bereft, too, in her widowhood of respect for the dead husband; her own motherless condition made her love leap out to her who claimed it as a mother.

"I can not thank you, Alain," she said, "if Alain you are, for I am not certain even of my cousin's name, but I will go with you back to the home I never thought to see again, and I will try to be the daughter and sister to your house, which it lacks."

"My mother quilted this, your little sleeve, into my helmet, Isabel, and when she put it there she bade me wear my lady's colors like a true knight until I had rescued her. And when I found you she bade me show it to you, for then you would know that she loved you indeed; a proof that does not seem convincing to me, yet I know well that she does love you," added honest Alain.

But Isabel stroked the little pearl-sewn sleeve fondly. "It is proof, cousin Alain," she said. "When I see her I will tell her how sweet was the message of womanly thoughtfulness and tenderness the little sleeve brought me in a strange land."

"And now, when shall we start for England?" asked Alain. "I never thought her fogs would seem so fair and desirable."

"At once, in the morning!" cried Isabel, springing up with new life.

"Will you not linger one day, just to let me prove to you that Castel Malheureux is not the abode of cruelty only?" asked Raoul, wistfully.

"Dear Raoul, we know that now," said Isabel, touching the boy's shoulder fondly. "Do you think I can ever forget that you were my friend when I needed one so sorely, and were ready to sacrifice anything for me? But Dame Winifred is haunted with the thought of the death she hath wrought, and though she is thankful that she has delivered me, like another Judith, still she can not breathe in this atmosphere, for she is not a warrior by trade, and even a just death lies on her heavily when done by her hand."

So let us go, and by and by, when happier days come, we shall meet again, for you will visit our England, or we shall return to your France."

Raoul submitted with bad grace, and together the entire party made their way down the hill, past the château where Isabel had been held prisoner, to the Castle of Misfortune, which Raoul was to transform into a Castle of Benevolence.

And in the morning Isabel, with Alain at her rein, and Roger conducting Dame Winifred's palfrey, and Jean riding sadly because it was so short a time before they should part, quitted the Castel Malheureux, and rode away on their course toward Amiens.

Arrived at that city, Alain decided to halt there over night to discover, if it were possible, what had been Hugo's fate. He had a faint hope that the stout old soldier had been found and nursed back to life by some kindly hands; at least, if he were dead, he would try to discover his grave, and mark it with a cross, for his had been a fidelity such as is too rare in a selfish world. Acting first on the brighter hope that he might be found alive, Alain went out after his cousin had been safely bestowed in the lodgings he had found for her, and wended his steps toward a Franciscan monastery, where the brethren were renowned for their skill in healing, and their goodness in practising their art; had Hugo been found alive, Alain reasoned, it was here that he would have been carried for nursing.

The friar who admitted him listened to his story, and when it had ended he smiled, and said: "Then the poor man is not raving. Yes, such a one as you describe was brought to us for healing, found on the road to Castel Malheureux, as you say. Our Brothers nursed him through his fever, but now he raves of the young lady

who was carried off by villains, and begs to be allowed to go single-handed to her rescue. We have thought that the blow he had received on his head had deranged him, and have kept him close. Apparently the poor fellow is sane after all."

"And you did not investigate his story?" asked Alain, wondering. "The young lady was in sore straits, and the tale quite true. By your leave I will take Hugo with me to England; the sight of Lady Isabel safe and well, and on her way back to her home, will do more to reestablish him than any herbs."

When Alain returned to his cousin, Hugo, tall and grim-looking, with his head shaved, and his face hollow from suffering, was with him, and the cry of joy Isabel uttered as she saw her true friend once more made Alain feel that if he had endured a thousand times more than the trials which his journey in quest of her had cost him, that moment was worth it all. Jean rode with them all the way to Calais. When he had seen Isabel, Dame Winifred, Roger, and Hugo on board the ship that was to carry them across the channel, and had not only wrung Alain's hand, English fashion, but kissed him repeatedly in his own way, he rode sadly back to Arras and the wood-carver's family, feeling the sunshine had gone from his sky. Nor did many years pass before he followed these friends into England, and Isabel's children found his love waiting them when they came to lighten Darrington.

How bright, how beautiful looked the white cliffs as these wanderers drew near the English shore! Isabel wondered at herself, for, though her two dear ones were not at Darrington to welcome her, but slept beneath that green English turf, her heart leaped joyously, and she felt that she was coming home.

All the village sleeping at the foot of the castle went forth to

welcome their dear young lady after all her sorrows, and not less heartily to welcome the loyal youth who had restored her to them, and her own to her.

A gorgeous cavalcade, all gay with trumpets, banners, glad shouts, and happy faces, accompanied the procession that wound up the hill to Darrington Castle, bringing Isabel home. And at the summit, standing in the broad doorway, was Lady Margaret, leaning trembling on Lord Guy's arm, for not only was she rejoiced that Isabel was safe, but Alain, her last, dearest child, had come back unscathed from the field of Agincourt, from the dangers of travel, and had they not heard from the king himself that he owed his life to this youngest son of Darrington?

But Lady Margaret did not forget where her first duty lay. While Guy held his brother fast in a speechless clasp of welcome, the mother folded to her warm heart the lonely girl, and kissed her as her own mother might have done. "Welcome home, my dear, my only daughter," she whispered. "Love us a little, for we will love you so much."

"Not a little; a great deal, with all my heart," whispered Isabel back, feeling that for the first time in her conscious life she had a mother.

Lord Guy looked at the unknown cousin, and as he looked something leaped into his eyes, and Isabel's drooped beneath them. He had been prepared to find her beautiful, sweet, too, for this he had heard of her always, but not what she was, not possessing a charm which he had felt in no other woman.

Lady Margaret saw the look, and glanced fearfully at Alain. He, too, had seen it, but he returned his mother's glance with a look so bright, clear and significant that it set her heart at rest. If

Alain had not learned to love her with a love stronger than a brother's, in these long hours passed at her side, what could be so blessed as that Guy should make Isabel his wife?

The dream was fulfilled. When the hawthorn, that had been white when the herald rode to Darrington announcing its misfortune, bloomed again, Isabel, clad in garments as snowy as the hawthorn's own, spoke the vows in the old chapel which made her Lady Darrington. And when they had been uttered Alain departed to join the gallant king he loved, to win with him new glory on the field.

It is said that some time later Alain rode to Carnaymond, and brought back Sir Robert Aymond's beautiful sister to be a sister to Isabel also, but that is outside the limit of this chronicle. Certain it is that though Dame Winifred and Hugo adored Alain as the rescuer of their dear lady, Alain's children were not so idolized by them as the young heir of Darrington, or Isabel's sweet little daughter. But to Lady Margaret Alain was ever a little nearer and dearer than all other earthly objects, and as to the children, like a true grandmother, she spoiled them all.

Darrington Castle smiles under its ivies, and grows sunnier as the years go by, for in its shade play the pledges of its future, and within its walls perfect happiness reigns.

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